

MY BOOK OF STORMS

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by

Valerie Work

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### Characters

Stephanie: Female, age seventeen.

Rachel: Female, age twelve. Sister to STEPHANIE.

Olivia: Female, early fifties. Mother to STEPHANIE and RACHEL, wife to WILLIAM.

William (Bill): Male, early fifties. Father to STEPHANIE and RACHEL, husband to OLIVIA.

### Scene

The family living room, other areas in the family home. Stratton, OH.

### Time

Saturday. September or October. Hurricane season.

### Production Notes:

The storm provides the liquid medium in which all action and dialogue are immersed. Alternately, the storm can be thought of as the fifth character in the play. There should be significant stretches of time in which the characters are silent onstage, or absent doing things offstage, so that the storm can alternate with them as a center of attention. Because of these pauses, the play will yield a longer performance than the page count suggests.

### Program Notes:

(in the tradition of those blocks of text that start off science fiction and superhero movies, like Star Wars and Heroes - In the Not So Distant Future and so on)

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible predicts that the United States will soon fall from its position as leading world power and that shortly following this fall, the larger world system will collapse under growing pressure from political, economic and social problems, widespread famine and pestilence, increasingly severe

environmental problems and natural disasters, and the resultant death of the majority of the population. Once the human family has proven beyond reasonable doubt that it is incapable of caring for its members and the earth we inhabit, but before the entire race dies off and the earth is irreversibly damaged, Jehovah God will step in and replace human governments with a single divine ruler, Jesus, who will lead the remaining humans and the resurrected dead in establishing a new system in which resident humans will live indefinitely on a restored planet, in the absence of sickness, oppression and death. This is what Witnesses preach from door to door.

"He that is touching you is touching my eyeball."  
(Zechariah 2:8 - God speaking)

Scene 1

(A dark stage, lit only by a desk lamp. Stephanie sits at her desk, writing. 12:30 am Friday night/Saturday morning. We can already hear the wind, but no other storm sounds so far. The sounds of the storm crescendo through the end of the play but never climax.)

## STEPHANIE

Michael Servetus was born on September 29th, 1511, in Aragon, Spain, and executed October 27th, 1553, for heresy. Studied Latin, Greek and Hebrew and read the entire Bible in its original languages from manuscripts that were available at that time. Published books: "On the Errors of the Trinity," "Dialogues on the Trinity," "On the Justice of Christ's Reign," "Christianismi Restitutio." Opposed the doctrine of the Trinity, infant baptism, predestination. Drew the ire of Catholics and Protestants alike, especially Calvin, with whom he was, initially, a friend, but the relationship devolved into doctrinal quarrels and intense personal hostility. Yes. Was burnt at the stake with what was thought to be the last copy of any of his books chained to his leg with irons, all because of his faith - yes - oh, Servetus, incidentally also the first European to describe pulmonary circulation and a skilled dissection assistant, physician - yes - all because of his faith - faith - assured expectation of things hoped for, evident demonstration of realities though not beheld - yes - and all of this - yes - all of this is why you should accept me into your esteemed college. (pause) No. No, no, no, no. Crap.

Scene 2

(Family living room is revealed. There are two entrances, one leading to the garage and the other to the kitchen, laundry room and the rest of the house. The room is dominated by a sectional sofa and some cushy upholstered chairs, all of which are just a little too large. 10 am. RACHEL holds a handful of index notecards. She is practicing a school presentation with STEPHANIE as her practice audience. Continued sounds of wind and occasional rumbles of thunder.)

RACHEL

So. This is my report on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Holocaust.

(RACHEL clears her throat momentarily.)

RACHEL

Jehovah's Witnesses endured intense persecution under the Nazis between the years of 1933 and the end of World War II in 1945. Because they would not give allegiance to the Nazi party and refused to serve in the military, they were detained, put in concentration camps, or imprisoned during the Holocaust. More than 12,000 Jehovah's Witnesses were admitted to concentration camps, and more than 2,000 were killed there, with over 250 killed by beheading.

(RACHEL draws a finger across her neck to indicate beheading and then gags dramatically.)

RACHEL

Many others lost their jobs and were sent to regular prisons. Unlike the Jews, the Gypsies and other groups, Jehovah's Witnesses were given the option of escaping persecution and personal harm by renouncing their beliefs. If they did they would have to sign a statement. This is a sample of the statement.

(RACHEL picks up a book.)

RACHEL

I will pass this around so you can see it.

(RACHEL passes the book to STEPHANIE.)

Very few Witnesses signed. Their courage won them the respect of fellow prisoners and even state officials. In the concentration camps, Jehovah's Witnesses wore the symbol of the purple triangle. This is a picture of the purple triangle.

(RACHEL opens a second bookmarked book and shows the picture.)

RACHEL

I will pass the book around.

(RACHEL hands the book to STEPHANIE.)

RACHEL

So. These are the facts. This is the truth. But also. I have a video to play, about the experience of the Kusserow family. The Kusserows were a family of Witnesses who lived at this time. All twelve family members were arrested at least once between the years of 1936 and 1944, except the three youngest, that were sent to a Nazi orphanage, and two were executed for holding their beliefs, these were the ones who were older. (breaking out of report mode) So then I just play the video-

(RACHEL gestures pressing a play button on an imaginary DVD player, watching it, pressing the stop button and turning back to her audience.)

RACHEL

-and afterwards, I answer questions. (momentous pause) Do you think it's okay?

STEPHANIE

It's good. I think it's good. The statistics are good. Got to have some statistics. Yeah. And you hit the personal interest angle with just the right amount of emphasis.

RACHEL

Ok. Thanks.

(RACHEL puts down the index cards and skips off. OLIVIA enters, holding a brown paper bag full of corn on the cob, a large clean plate, and a folded brown paper bag for trash.)

OLIVIA

(to STEPHANIE)

Help me shuck the corn.

(OLIVIA sits on the sofa and arranges her corn shucking materials. STEPHANIE sits next to her. Each picks up an ear and shucks it in silence, places it on the plate, and picks up a second ear.)

OLIVIA

It's nice of you to help Rachel with her presentation. I can't believe they're doing the Holocaust in sixth grade already.

STEPHANIE

Yeah. It's good. She's pretty much set.

(pause. More shucking.)

STEPHANIE

You're upset about my essay. You can say it, Mom.

OLIVIA

Well, yes, yes, I am. What I really don't understand is why, if you are going to apply to college, if you are going to write your college application essay, if you are going to write your college application essay about a historical person, why you are writing it about Michael Servetus. It doesn't make any sense. I'm very confused. Also, somewhat bothered. It is like an uncomfortable silence. I guess, I do see a vague connection. But there are so many more obviously related examples.

STEPHANIE

Like what?

OLIVIA

Four Watchtower presidents, various tormented Americans subject to mob violence for their neutral stand during various major wars, sent to prison because they wouldn't fight, the Holocaust victims, like Rachel, of course, the Kusserows, your own grandparents, on your father's side, now deceased, riding bicycles through the countryside carrying books, before there were cars, before they had cars, here, or, China, Harold King, the ones the Chinese sent to prison, solitary confinement for years, or, what

else, I'm leaving out something else, some important one. I know it.

(WILLIAM enters, distracted.)

WILLIAM

Oh. Hey. Say. I'm trying to get some yard work done. Rake some of these leaves, pull up the weeds. Before the storm comes. But there are thistles, thorny ones, thorny ones on the weeds, and I can't find my gloves. You know, the yellow nubby ones, with the little plastic - nubs. The bumps there to grip things with. They're a cotton polyester blend. I think. Bright yellow orange maybe. My usual garden gloves. Have you seen them?

OLIVIA

They're in the laundry room, I think. Go check.

(WILLIAM exits to go look in the laundry room. There is a pause filled with sounds of looking. OLIVIA and STEPHANIE continue to shuck corn. More sounds of wind outside.)

WILLIAM

(offstage)

Hey.

(He returns to the living room holding the gloves.)

WILLIAM

You were right. On top of the washer. Thanks.

(WILLIAM exits back towards the garage. The pile of shucked corn on the plate is becoming enormously large. There is far more shucked corn than a family of four could possibly eat for dinner, and no telling how much more is yet in the bag.)

OLIVIA

It aggravates me, your choice of subject. I have to admit, it causes you to lose points.

STEPHANIE

Points?



OLIVIA

Points. Like most mothers, I keep a running tally of points so I know which of my children I like best at any given point in time. So, for example. You get five points for helping me shuck the corn. Very good. Just as Rachel would get 10 points for setting the dinner table without being asked - well, hypothetically setting the dinner table without being asked, because of course, this would never happen-

STEPHANIE

Hey. How come Rachel gets ten points for hypothetically setting the dinner table, when I only get five for actually shucking the corn?

OLIVIA

Now, that is the true beauty of the system. It is completely arbitrary and dependent on my mood. (pause, last of the shucking) Corn's done. Thanks.

STEPHANIE

You're welcome.

(OLIVIA exits, taking the shucked corn to the kitchen. STEPHANIE takes the shuckings out the garage to the trash. STEPHANIE reenters and exits out the other entrance towards the rest of the house. After a moment OLIVIA returns to the living room and begins to dig through drawers looking for RACHEL's most recent school picture. The family photos are not as organized as they probably could be. She pulls out a number of boxes and photo albums, creating piles on the coffee table and floor. The rain begins and brings with it occasional bursts of thunder and lightening. The wind continues. OLIVIA finds an album she wasn't expecting to find, looks at it oddly, opens it and begins to look through the pictures.)

OLIVIA

(addressing the album)

Huh. Haven't seen you for a while.

(She looks up from the photo album as if she sees an imaginary person, ERIC, in fact. Actually she continues speaking to herself.)

OLIVIA

I can see you there. I can see you there you know. Wearing an expensive suit with no mustache or beard any more, no more excessive body hair, and you are eating an apple. Clever. Hello. Hi there. (pause.) So I heard you married Gail and moved to New York to be some kind of investment banker on Wall Street. I heard that from Gail. I heard that from Gail probably fifteen, more like eighteen or nineteen or even, actually, twenty now years ago. She called to say she'd gotten married. I know, yes. She may have mentioned that. (pause) That Tony had gone back to Mexico. Alicia got pregnant, kept the baby, back in Denver. Scott, you all went back to finish college. (pause) That's right. That's right I left. That's right I did leave. That's right. (pause) It was nice of her to call. (pause) You know I'm married too now. (pause) Yes.

BILL

(offstage)

Olivia?

OLIVIA

In here. (to ERIC) That's Bill. Okay, I know. You could probably guess that.

(BILL enters.)

BILL

(noticing photo album)

What's that?

OLIVIA

I was trying to find Rachel's new school pictures to give to my mother tomorrow. You know my mother wants them? She keeps asking. Anyway I know they're in here somewhere. In one of these piles. They're in one of these other books, I just don't know which one yet. I stuck them in with all the other photos in some kind of hurry for some reason but they've moved. On somewhere. But look. Here. I found my old photos from San Francisco.

BILL

Oh. (sits, looks at album with OLIVIA) You know, I've never seen these.

OLIVIA

(turning pages and indicating various photos)  
This was the park we marched in. Gail hugging a tree. Beads - these little weird Indian, Native American beads in all these different random colors, glass I think and some were painted. The paint didn't always match the color of the glass. And posters of rock groups, psychedelic posters that we were very into for a while. Okay, yes, there are a lot of these posters. Yes. Hmmm. Okay. This is an actual drum circle, a close-up, of me with my little drum. Here. It's really cute. And that was my actual hair. That was my actual hair at that point in time. Our little Buddha. Mary and Tony and Clark. Me with Eric. He's the one who started all of this.

BILL

Huh.

OLIVIA

Yeah, I can't remember if I told you. Oh wait. These ones go back farther. This is us still in college. I liked being away from home but also I kind of hated it. I actually hated to both read and write papers and I kept staying up late and then sleeping through a lot of classes. Not the best. Not really the best student. I know I told you that. That I think my parents really wanted me out of the house and I had no idea what I was doing there. So I just ended up in all these protests - look - this one was Vietnam, and this was some kind of - environmental thing? There's a sign there but I can't read it. There's that head in front of it. Not sure of the cause. Then this was our road trip, in Eric's car, and we met up with some other people in Denver, where Alicia was from - see, this is her here - and she brought some other people with her. Yes. It took forever to get to San Francisco because we kept stopping, that was part of the point of the thing, and we were camping, like here, or slept in the car and ate a lot of peanut butter on toast or crackers and at all these little diners. We drank so much bad coffee and no one shaved at all for months and we weren't really washing our hair either. It was one of those things where everyone kind of stank but everyone stank so no one really cared and anyway we were smoking a lot of weed.

BILL

Well.

OLIVIA

Yeah, that was it. We finally got there and it was the middle of everything then. We found those abandoned houses with no lights and no heat but the park was right there and it did work pretty well for a while, begging food from the tourists who came to see the real live hippies.

BILL

Sounds like a band name.

OLIVIA

Yeah. Then they started making those awful hippie dolls that looked like Barbie and everyone, everyone just got jaded and sick of it. Why not leave and go back home and make money, or something. (pause) It was cold. It got more and more cold. And damp, it was getting pretty damp too. The Summer of Love was a lot more romantic than the winter that followed. (pause) Bill. I want go back there. With you and the girls. I can show you the places. I haven't been back since I left. I want to show it. See what it's become. You hear all these stories.

BILL

But. I thought you were - I thought you were pretty happy here. You left there. I mean. You did.

OLIVIA

I know. I am. It was a phase. I guess. I mean. I am much happier now. But this. This was the beginning. The first. The genesis, the moment. The sound. It was the realization of me of what I would become. The start of running away without having anything to run toward yet. The destination. The destination kept changing. (pause) We were strolling through the angry streets at dawn, looking for a fix.

BILL

An exodus.

OLIVIA

Of sorts. Yes. From what our parents wanted. From the thing. From the rest of the world.

BILL

When I was growing up I had this best friend named Gus. That I guess I've never talked about much either because he eventually moved away, out of Ohio and we sort of lost touch. Anyway we went fishing and were the lunch servers

together at all the assemblies. The big ones that used to last a whole week in the giant outdoor stadiums where everyone would sweat and come home with a sunburn and you were always a little bit worried about the old people and babies getting a heatstroke. We were lab partners sometimes at school. After we finished high school there was this whole thing. With the war, that people were being drafted, you know, what you were protesting, but basically you had a choice, if you were a man then, of going to college somewhere or pioneering, spending enough time preaching each month that you could be an official certified minister and exempt or else you could be drafted, so I pioneered and a lot of kids did that including Gus for a year but then he stopped, had to work full time and then right away got the draft, and ended up going to jail because we couldn't actually go and fight and it took a bunch of time to straighten out and I never could decide with Gus whether the whole thing was inspiring, an inspiring example or just plain dumb, like why would you do that to yourself, was the extra work money really that important. So. Yeah.

OLIVIA

Yeah. That's kind of what it was like. (long pause) Anyway, do you want to help me go through these or do you need to get back to your projects list?

BILL

Hmmm.

(BILL takes his list out of a pocket and reads.)

BILL

Rake leaves. Check.  
 Put raked leaves in yellow bins. Check.  
 Put yellow bins with leaves out for trash. Check.  
 Light bulbs. Rachel's room. Check.  
 Kitchen, above corner counter space. Check.  
 Closet - linen closet. Check.  
 Fill hole - small hole in back hall where picture was hung. Check.  
 Battery - fire alarm, finally, check.  
 Organize sock drawer. Your rule, at last. Check.  
 Hang blinds. Venetian blinds. Blast them. Check.  
 Balance checkbook. Pay phone bill. Check. Check. And also, electric. Check.

Weed vegetable patch.  
Weed killer, sprinkle, also veg. patch.  
Unclog bird feeder.  
Uncoil hose.  
Clean.  
Recoil.

Hmmmm.

(BILL regards his list.)

BILL

I guess photos.  
Or.  
Well.  
I can't really do that with the rain.  
Yeah. Let's look.

(BILL folds his list and replaces it in his pocket. They each pick up a new album or box and go through it. Continued rain and wind sounds. OLIVIA puts her box or album down and picks up another box, opens it.)

OLIVIA

Oh look. Look at that, there they are.

(She removes the pictures, which are in one of those school picture envelopes.)

OLIVIA

I don't know why I put them in here. I mean, it really doesn't make any sense.

(OLIVIA takes out one of the pictures.)

OLIVIA

I've always thought that Rachel is generally more photogenic than Stephanie is but gosh. These pictures this year are really bad.

BILL

Yeah.

OLIVIA

And to think that this was the best of the bunch.

(OLIVIA makes some effort to clean up and put the albums and boxes away, but she ends up shoving a bunch of them under the coffee table.)

OLIVIA

I'll clean these up later. I have to go put the chicken in.

(OLIVIA exits. BILL pauses for a moment to figure out what he is going to do next, then exits purposefully. STEPHANIE enters and plops on the couch with a pile of homework. She works for a while, chewing the end of her pencil. RACHEL enters with a scrapbook and scrapbook materials, such as paste, pictures and caption stickers. She begins to paste down pictures and write in captions. Outside the wind and rain grow louder and stronger. Occasionally the wind grows to a howl and the rain beats hard. It is a gusty storm at the moment. STEPHANIE is very distracted by the storm, RACHEL and her own thoughts.)

STEPHANIE

What is that?

RACHEL

My book of storms.

STEPHANIE

A gaggle of geese. A flock of doves.

RACHEL

A pack of wolves. An army of ants.

STEPHANIE

An aerie of eagles.

RACHEL

A bed of clams.

STEPHANIE

An intrusion of cockroaches.

RACHEL

A flight of dragons.

STEPHANIE

A rainbow of butterflies.

RACHEL

A book of storms.

STEPHANIE

Perfect. What kinds?

RACHEL

The thunderous kind.  
 The eager kind.  
 The scurrying kind.  
 The plodding kind.  
 The yet sunny kind.  
 The windy kind.  
 The drippy kind.  
 The icy kind.  
 The cloudburst kind.  
 The torrent kind.  
 The current kind.

STEPHANIE

What do you see?

(Both look out the window)

RACHEL

Wind, by movement of leaves, attached and detached from trees; rocks, small, medium, large; a turtle; centipedes; garden rakes; roof shingles, tiles and mortar; bricks; beagles; cats; mice; snails; shutters from windows; siding from walls; assorted plaster: light brighter than light, sheltered by sky, illuminating, slanting, dusting surfaces of wind, glinting, streaming, scattering, melting, hiding, stretching, cracking open, entering; hail, falling, pounding, leeching, hitting, bouncing, skipping, breaking, crushing, unlatching, zesting, zinging, reaching, finding.

STEPHANIE

What do you hear?

RACHEL

Howling. Ripping, thundering, crying, screaming, booms of tree-breaks, splinters, tossed buckets; thuds, subtle and not; tearing of tires, electric lines, wires, mended



fences, wooden beams; breaking of windows; farting seams;  
whipping tennis nets; scouring gravel, angry and limp.

(The sisters regard each other. Outside, bright  
lightening followed two seconds later by loud  
thunder. RACHEL pastes the last picture.  
Another pause.)

RACHEL

Now I want a snack.

(RACHEL exits. She leaves the scrapbook on the  
coffee table.)

## Scene 3

(STEPHANIE at her desk, working on her essay again. The desk is kind of superimposed over the living room so that it is onstage the whole time but is clearly a different room. The wind is temporarily quiet but the rain has increased. Thunder and lightening at intervals.)

STEPHANIE

It was the fact of the trial. The dissolution of the friendship with Calvin. The brief foray into medical practice following his studies. The becoming of the first modern martyr by Unitarians.

(Pause. She thinks.)

STEPHANIE

The hotness of the fire. That religious freedom did not yet really exist at that time.

(STEPHANIE looks up, startled by thunder. She decides to change tactics by holding a conversation with an imaginary Servetus.)

STEPHANIE

All right. I can see you there. I can see you there and you are wearing. Funny 17<sup>th</sup> century clothing or yes, my idea of it, and you are going to stay there, you are going to stay right there and help me with this essay. Good. So. So Michael. Mikey. How's it going. (pause) Why'd you do it. Why did you do all of it. If you're going to stand there you can at least, you can help with this essay. (pause) Why am I writing this essay. Why am I writing this essay about you. Well. If I knew that. If I knew that we wouldn't be here now would we. It would not have come to this, Mr. Funny Pants. (pause) You want to hear an actual story about me. Well I don't know about this. I don't know about this suggestion at all, it makes me suspicious of your motives and origins. But. Okay. Yes. One night, when I was younger than Rachel, ten maybe, or younger, I became absolutely convinced beyond any doubt that Armageddon was going to come before I woke up the next morning. The world was charged with energy. It crackled through the kitchen and up the stairs. Before I went to bed I looked out my window

into the darkness and said goodbye to our town, our neighbors, the kids at school, the world, and I prayed, and went to sleep. And then I was awake and everything was still there, and the feeling was gone. (pause) But, yes. Yes of course I know that. I know Armageddon is not going to come that way. I was too young then. To understand. All I had to go on was the feeling of the energy. (pause) I wasn't upset, when I woke up, and realized I'd been wrong. I got up and brushed my teeth.

(pause)

OLIVIA

(from offstage)

Stephanie! Dinner! Come help me set up!

STEPHANIE

(to OLIVIA)

Just a minute!

(to imaginary SERVETUS)

I don't know if that was useful. I don't know if that was useful at all. What a visit. Huh.

OLIVIA

(still offstage)

Stephanie! Even Rachel is here! (pause) I'm going to take away points!

STEPHANIE

All right I have to go. Bye. Goodbye. I'll see you later.

## Scene 4

(Six PM. Dinner. Very loud wind and rain, thunder, lightening. We are approaching the heart of the storm. There are four TV trays set up in the living room in front of the sofa and a chair or two. STEPHANIE, OLIVIA, WILLIAM and RACHEL bring out the last of the food in platters on the coffee table, in an informal procession. In addition to the corn on the cob there are chicken, potatoes and a salad. Everyone sits, each in front of their own TV tray. All bow their heads and close their eyes.)

WILLIAM

(prays)

Our father Jehovah, we thank you for this food and for this day of life and for the night which confronts us. May we use this time productively to accomplish our various goals. We ask forgiveness of our sins and your continued blessing on our earthwide organization of Witnesses. Amen.

RACHEL, STEPHANIE and OLIVIA

(not quite in unison)

Amen.

(They begin pass the food and then to eat. They eat dinner in real time.)

RACHEL

Can I have more potatoes.

(Potatoes are passed to RACHEL, who takes more potatoes.)

BILL

Pass the corn.

(Corn is passed to BILL, who takes another ear.)

STEPHANIE

This is really good Mom. I like the sauce. The gravy.

BILL

Yeah.

RACHEL

Yeah.

OLIVIA

Thanks. Stephanie helped me with the corn.

(Pause, more eating. RACHEL drops her fork, but it didn't leave a spot so she wipes it on her napkin and continues to eat.)

STEPHANIE

(to BILL)

Did you get your yard work done?

BILL

Well, some of it. Not as much as I would have liked. Nasty storm. Nasty storm out there.

STEPHANIE

Yeah.

BILL

I worked through the drizzle part, on all of those weeds in the side yard, but then it just got too bad.

STEPHANIE

Yeah.

BILL

Yeah, I had to come in. You never know, how much time you're gonna get with these guys. And I spent almost half of it looking for those gloves. Have to find a better spot for them. Better spot.

STEPHANIE

Yeah.

BILL

They're still pretty new, those gloves. But I like them.

OLIVIA

Yeah.

BILL

Yeah. A quality pair I can tell.

OLIVIA

Did you all see. In the paper. The case is really going to the Supreme Court. I read about it in the paper today. There was a big article. In the D section, eighth page. Biggest thing to hit Stratton in a while. Long while I'd guess.

BILL

No, didn't read that yet. What's new?

OLIVIA

Just the fact that the Supreme Court accepted the case. They might not have you know. They turn away almost all the cases they get each year. Take just about one percent. One percent of some 7000 petitions.

STEPHANIE

Did it say the date yet? The date of the case?

OLIVIA

February 26, 2002.

STEPHANIE

Wow. This is the first one I've been alive for. First Witness Supreme Court case.

RACHEL

It's like being a part of history. Look. I have a corn kernel fish, three corn kernel fish in mash potato gravy soup. This one is Jaws. Snap snap.

BILL

Probably ought to eat that. I don't know. I don't know if the town is going to be happy or not. Lot of attention.

STEPHANIE

But they're the bad guy. They're so totally going to lose.

RACHEL

I don't get it. What's the big deal?

STEPHANIE

It's freedom of speech, freedom of religion and freedom of the press, all in one case. You know how that town is really fussy, right? Always have been. They're totally into themselves and their little town hall and church. So they passed this ordinance.

OLIVIA

"Regulating Uninvited Peddling and Solicitation Upon Private Property."

STEPHANIE

Right. They passed this ordinance so anyone who wanted to speak door to door in Stratton would have to go to that town hall first and get a special permit from the mayor. They were sick of talking to the Witnesses, but also basically to everyone. People raising money. Political parties.

OLIVIA

The point was they would never have to hear. You would never have to hear anything. You would never have to hear anything you didn't want to hear.

BILL

Right.

OLIVIA

You didn't agree with. You didn't agree with in full. You didn't believe. You didn't already believe.

STEPHANIE

Trick-or-treaters.

OLIVIA

What?

STEPHANIE

Trick-or-treaters. They wouldn't let trick-or-treaters in. They wouldn't even let trick-or-treaters in then.

BILL

But Stephanie, that's a weird comment. We don't go trick-or-treating.

RACHEL

Sometime somebody should go trick-or-treating as Witnesses and leave them with copies of the Watchtower. That would be funny.

(Pause. Everyone finishes eating.)

BILL

Well, I'm about done. Good food Olivia.

STEPHANIE

Yeah Mom.

RACHEL

Thanks.

(BILL takes his plate and silverware to the sink in the kitchen offstage. The others finish up and follow suit. There are sounds of rinsing plates and putting them in the dishwasher. They take the extra food out of the living room and put it in plastic containers and into the fridge. Audience can hear their conversation offstage)

OLIVIA

Wait Rachel, no. Put that in here. This one right here. Not that other one.

RACHEL

Ooops. I dropped this ear of corn Mom.

OLIVIA

Well, rinse it off then. No harm done.

STEPHANIE

I can dry that.

OLIVIA

I forgot - here, put the salt away. In the cabinet where you put the pepper.

(Pause, cleaning and putting away sounds blended with continued storm sounds.)

BILL

There's this question now. Of what we do with the rest of the evening.

OLIVIA

How much homework do you girls have to do?

RACHEL

None! Just my presentation and it's all set.



STEPHANIE

She's pretty much ready.

BILL

How about you, Stephanie?

STEPHANIE

Some. I could do more tonight or all of it tomorrow. My essay's not going anywhere. Not anywhere fast.

BILL

Because I'm thinking, we could have our family study tonight since we're all here and then we can not have to do it tomorrow morning.

STEPHANIE

That works. I'm all about sleeping late.

OLIVIA

Okay. And then maybe some Bible Name Pillow Game.

RACHEL

Yay!

OLIVIA

We're basically done here. Let's get the Watchtowers.

(Everyone straggles back into the family room carrying Watchtower magazines, Bibles, pens and highlighters. Someone puts the tray tables away behind the sofa. Cushions are fluffed. They sit around the coffee table, stare at each other for a moment and then bow their heads to pray.)

WILLIAM

Jehovah, we thank you for this opportunity to come together as a family to study for our Watchtower lesson tomorrow. Please help us all to pay attention and to learn and benefit from the material we will be discussing. Amen.

OLIVIA, STEPHANIE and RACHEL

Amen.

WILLIAM

So tomorrow's Watchtower lesson is titled, "Communication within Families: Meeting the Challenge." There are four

subheadings, "Developing Communication Skills," "Overcoming Obstacles," "Pay Attention to How You Listen," and "Help from God's Word." and the review questions are - Rachel, would you like to read the review questions.

RACHEL

"Why is good communication within families vital?" "What are some obstacles to good communication, and how can they be overcome?" "What is the value of developing good listening skills?" And the fourth, "How can the Bible help families to communicate more effectively?"

WILLIAM

Good. So by the end, this is what we will have learned. Now to start. Stephanie, please read the first three paragraphs. They're all lumped together there.

STEPHANIE

"I should not have said that." "I did not express my thoughts clearly." Have you ever felt this way after trying to communicate with your spouse, children, parents or other family members? Communication is a skill that needs to be developed and cultivated. As is the case with most skills, some people seem to be able to master it quickly and easily, while others struggle. However, even if you feel that you are a member of the latter group, it is still possible for you to learn communication skills that will help you to convey your thoughts and feelings to your loved ones more effectively.

Frank communication can prevent misunderstandings. Early in the history of the Israelites, three tribes who lived on the east side of the Jordan River constructed "an altar great in conspicuousness" on the bank of the river. The tribes dwelling on the other side of the river misunderstood their actions. Believing that their brother tribes were worshipping false gods, these tribes prepared to go to war with the traitorous, altar-building "rebels." Before marching forth, they decided to send a delegation to the other side of the river in an attempt to communicate with the eastern tribes. Through this wise action, they discovered that the altar was not for making illegal sacrifices, as they had thought was the case. Instead, the east bank tribes intended that their altar would serve as a witness that they, too, worshipped Jehovah.

In this instance, open communication prevented armed conflict among the extended family of Israelites. What a fine pattern for families of Jehovah's worshippers today!

WILLIAM

Now our question on the first paragraph is. "Why is it important to learn to communicate effectively? Explain."

OLIVIA

The first paragraph starts off talking about the fact that communication is a learned skill, rather than something people are born with. So it is possible to develop these skills over time and improve, even if you don't think you're very good at it now.

BILL

Good. How about the example of the two groups of Israelites?

STEPHANIE

The one group built an altar, and the other group thought they were breaking the law and worshipping idols, but they actually just wanted to have their own altar to worship Jehovah, too, which of course was a good thing.

BILL

Good.

STEPHANIE

So if they wouldn't have taken steps to communicate, they would have gone out and killed each other, which would have generally sucked.

BILL

Right. Let's take a look at the cited scriptures. Rachel, could you please read Joshua 22:10-19?

(All open their Bibles to the appropriate place.)

RACHEL

(reads)

"Hence we said, 'Let us take action in our behalf, please, by building the altar, not for burnt offering nor sacrifice, but that it may be a witness between us and you and our generations after us that we shall render the service of Jehovah before him with our burnt offerings and our sacrifices and our communion sacrifices, that your sons may not say in a future day to our sons: 'You have no share in Jehovah.' So we said, 'And it must occur that in case

they should say that to us and to our generations in a future day, we must also say: see the representation of Jehovah's altar that our fathers made, not for burnt offering nor for sacrifice, but it is a witness between us and you.'"

BILL

What is the significance of this scripture?

STEPHANIE

This is an example of. Communication in action. It's the response of the east of the river Israelites to the west of the river ones, explaining, communicating what they meant by building the altar.

BILL

Good. Guess I'll read the next paragraph. It's the first one under the first subheading, "Developing Communication Skills." Here we go. "What does communication involve? One dictionary defines communication as "the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing or signs." Communication involves a sharing of ideas and emotions through a variety of mediums. It is made possible by confidence, trust and mutual understanding." So. The question. "What is communication?"

STEPHANIE

This is a random thought. But I've been thinking it since we started so I'm going to share it now, in the interests of promoting communication among family members. This whole article makes me think of the day that I woke up and really wanted to be an earthworm. To tunnel and feel the warm moist dirt sliding off my back and sense the presence of hidden rocks with my funny earthworm nose. To always be wet. To emanate mucus, thick and sticky. I've always wanted to tell someone. It's possibly my greatest dream.

BILL

Hmmm well that sort of relates.

(OLIVIA raises her hand and calls on herself.)

OLIVIA

Or it's like the singing. The singing at my first assembly, or convention, um, large gathering of Witnesses and everyone was singing together and it reverberated. With the

sound bouncing off the walls and everyone in unison, together, just people and sound.

WILLIAM

Okay. Well. I was thinking more of, an interchange of thoughts, opinions and information. Olivia, can you read paragraph 5?

OLIVIA

Right.

(reads)

"Just as there is a right time to speak, there is a time when it is best to keep quiet. As Ecclesiastes 3:1 explains, "For everything there is an appointed time, a time to keep quiet and a time to speak." It helps to determine the best time to share your thoughts or feelings. Is your family member angry or distracted? It may be beneficial to wait until a time when he or she will be better able to consider your point."

BILL

What is the role of proper timing in effective communication?

RACHEL

It says for everything there is an appointed time, and then the person will be able to listen to you better.

STEPHANIE

Like with building sand castles. Somehow it works much better during the summer.

RACHEL

You mean, like dumping the water into the sandbox from buckets and clumping up the wet sand so it sticks better. I like that part better.

STEPHANIE

That too.

WILLIAM

Wait, I think we're getting. We're getting a little side tracked here. I don't know about this. I don't know if this is appropriate, I mean, it's not here in the lesson.

STEPHANIE

Really sunny days and watching the sun reflect off the pavement.

OLIVIA

Or the water. Waves of it churning and lapping the shore.

BILL

It's not on the page here.

OLIVIA

I used to swing on my swing set, at my parents' house growing up in the back yard, and look out at the mountains, the mountains up behind our house. I used to think towards them, to talk to them but in monologues about growing up and accomplishing great things and exploring not only them, not only the heights but also the entire rest of the world.

RACHEL

Or, the Kusserows.

STEPHANIE

Huh?

RACHEL

The Kusserow family and the fact that they died, some of them. That they died for their faith and we are. We are connected.

STEPHANIE

We are connected because they are us. Because they could become us because we have a bond, a faith bond and a belief bond and an organizational bond and a history bond and.

OLIVIA

Yes.

BILL

And eating sausages. (pause) I mean I really like sausages, with the gristle and the spice there.

OLIVIA

And listening to the wind.

(pause. Everyone listens to the wind.)

STEPHANIE

Or hearing hail and rain from the inside of your house.

BILL

Back in high school some of us used to sneak chemicals out of the chem lab at the high school, Gus, Gus and me and this other guy sometimes. Blocks, little chunks of sodium and potassium, kept it in sealed containers and then went out to the river, the east one and dumped it in the water to watch it burn in bright colors, hot and fast. Probably killed off lots of fish.

STEPHANIE

Or falling asleep and having a dream that you could fly or, alternately, blow huge bubbles out your nose that could engulf people you don't like and then blow, blow them away until the bubble gets too close to the sun and pops from the heat and the energy there and they fall down screaming and die with lots of gory blood and spattered bone.

RACHEL

Wow.

OLIVIA

Yes.

RACHEL

It is my list of storms. I have invented a new kind.

STEPHANIE

What kind?

RACHEL

A strong kind.

OLIVIA

How 'bout a river kind.

STEPHANIE

A fat kind.

BILL

A green kind.

RACHEL

A Rachel kind.

(pause)

WILLIAM

Well. I guess we're close enough to done. I mean we can do the rest tomorrow or maybe just on our own so. Maybe it's time for The Game.

RACHEL

Yes!

STEPHANIE

Okay.

OLIVIA

Convert the space.

(Family members pile their study materials together and clear a space in the middle of the room. Each member of the family grabs one cushion to sit on and one to hold. They form a circle.)

WILLIAM

I can be It first.

(WILLIAM takes the It spot at the center of the circle. He takes some practice swings with his cushion. RACHEL's half-finished glass of juice remains on the coffee table with the rest of the study materials.)

OLIVIA

Wait! What is the rule of the Bible Name Pillow Game and beverages?

RACHEL

Oh! Not in the same room.

(RACHEL carries the glass of juice to the kitchen and returns. These are the rules of the Bible Name Pillow Game. Each player selects the name of a Bible book, the weirder-sounding the better, unless at least five people are playing and four of them decide to be John, First John, Second John and Third John, which is an especially good combination. One person stands in the middle



with a pillow and is It. Another person starts the game by announcing the "Bible name" of another player. The player named must quickly name the Bible name of another player. The person in the center attempts to whack this second individual with the pillow before he or she manages to pass the buck. Play continues until the whacker (It) is successful. The whacker switches places with the whackee. In this manner, play can continue indefinitely, until people get bored and decide to change Bible names, and this is the style adopted below. It is also possible to play using elimination rounds, especially with more than four people.)

STEPHANIE

I call Nehemiah.

RACHEL

No fair. You always get to be Nehemiah.

STEPHANIE

Well, we have to switch names at some point. You can be Nehemiah next.

RACHEL

Okay.

OLIVIA

I'll be Esther.

BILL

First Timothy for me, when I'm back in the game.

RACHEL

Zechariah. Almost as good as Nehemiah anyway. I'll start. Esther!

OLIVIA

Nehemiah!

STEPHANIE

Esther again!

OLIVIA

Nehemiah!

Zechariah! STEPHANIE

Esther! RACHEL

Zechariah! OLIVIA

Nehemiah! RACHEL

Esther! STEPHANIE

Zechariah! OLIVIA

Nehemiah! RACHEL

Esther! STEPHANIE

Zechariah! OLIVIA

Nehemiah! RACHEL

Esther! STEPHANIE

Zechariah! OLIVIA

Nehemiah! RACHEL

Esther! STEPHANIE

Nehemiah! OLIVIA

STEPHANIE

Esther!

OLIVIA

Nehemiah!

STEPHANIE

Esther!

OLIVIA

Nehemiah!

STEPHANIE

Esther!

OLIVIA

Zechariah!

RACHEL

Nehemiah!

STEPHANIE

Zechariah!

RACHEL

Nehemiah!

STEPHANIE

Zechariah!

RACHEL

Nehemiah!

STEPHANIE

Zechariah!

RACHEL

Ow!

(RACHEL has been hit by WILLIAM's pillow. She trades places with WILLIAM.)

WILLIAM

Nehemiah.

STEPHANIE

Esther.

First Timothy.	OLIVIA
Esther.	WILLIAM
First Timothy.	OLIVIA
Esther.	WILLIAM
Nehemiah.	OLIVIA
First Timothy.	STEPHANIE
Esther.	WILLIAM
First Timothy.	OLIVIA
Nehemiah.	WILLIAM
Esther.	STEPHANIE
Nehemiah.	OLIVIA
First Timothy.	STEPHANIE
Esther.	WILLIAM
First Timothy.	OLIVIA
Nehemiah.	WILLIAM
Esther.	STEPHANIE

OLIVIA  
Nehemiah.

STEPHANIE  
First Timothy.

WILLIAM  
Nehemiah.

STEPHANIE  
Esther.

(RACHEL strikes OLIVIA with the pillow.)

RACHEL  
Yes!

(RACHEL and OLIVIA trade places.)

STEPHANIE  
Let's switch names.

RACHEL  
I don't want to be Nehemiah now. How bout Job.

BILL  
Deuteronomy.

OLIVIA  
Song of Solomon.

STEPHANIE  
Habakkuk. I'm really down with the minor prophets tonight. (pause, thinks.) Or, we could expand. We always talk about expanding the game, so it could be the name of any Bible character instead of just the names of the books. We always talk about it but we never do. That would make it much more challenging.

OLIVIA  
Hmmm. Well, let's keep our names for now, since we've just picked them. We can try that in the next round. Okay.  
Rachel starts.

RACHEL  
Habbakkuk.

Deuteronomy. STEPHANIE

Habbakkuk. BILL

Deuteronomy. STEPHANIE

Job. BILL

Deuteronomy. RACHEL

Job. BILL

Habbakkuk. RACHEL

Deuteronomy. STEPHANIE

Job. BILL

Habbakkuk. RACHEL

Job. STEPHANIE

(OLIVIA hits RACHEL with the pillow. They  
switch places.)

Habbakkuk. OLIVIA

Song of Solomon. STEPHANIE

Habbakkuk. OLIVIA

Song of Solomon. STEPHANIE

Habbakkuk. OLIVIA

Song of Solomon. STEPHANIE

Deuteronomy. OLIVIA

Habbakkuk. WILLIAM

Deuteronomy. STEPHANIE

Song of Solomon. WILLIAM

Habbakkuk. OLIVIA

Song of Solomon. STEPHANIE

Deuteronomy. OLIVIA

Song of Solomon. BILL

Deuteronomy. OLIVIA

Song of Solomon. BILL

Deuteronomy. OLIVIA

Song of Solomon. BILL

Deuteronomy. OLIVIA

BILL

Habbakuk.

STEPHANIE

(a second before RACHEL hits her with the  
pillow)

Deuteronomy.

RACHEL

Did I get you?

STEPHANIE

Not really. I said it right before you hit.

RACHEL

Oh. I'm never going to get out.

OLIVIA

It does work better with more people. Rachel, you need to  
have a sleepover again.

BILL

And (to STEPHANIE) get Sarah too. She's got a fast arm.

STEPHANIE

It's too bad she's at her cousins' today.

(The phone rings.)

OLIVIA

Oh - I'll get that. I think it might be my mother.

(OLIVIA exits towards the kitchen, returns a  
moment later.)

OLIVIA

Hey, it is - you know this could take a while.

BILL

It's almost bedtime for Rachel anyway. I'll put the books  
away - girls, why don't you start putting the room back  
together.

(OLIVIA exits with the phone and WILLIAM exits  
with the books and study materials. STEPHANIE  
and RACHEL start putting the cushions back into



their proper places. STEPHANIE throws a pillow at RACHEL's head and scores.)

RACHEL

Hey!

(RACHEL bashes STEPHANIE back. STEPHANIE grabs another cushion and returns the blow.)

STEPHANIE

Pillow fight!

(STEPHANIE and RACHEL bash each other with cushions for a while, feinting, dodging, rolling around on the floor and jumping on and off the furniture.)

STEPHANIE

I say we're fighting for possession of a bronze and rubied necklace that gives the wearer the power to turn invisible and also to jump ten percent higher than the average person.

RACHEL

Okay. And also shoot death rays out of their eyes, death rays that are purpley blue with red dots.

STEPHANIE

Okay, now the floor is lava!

RACHEL

Eeek! Eeek!

(STEPHANIE and RACHEL jump onto the furniture and jump from couch to chair to chair to coffee table to avoid the lava, while trying the knock the other person into it.)

STEPHANIE

Now the rocks are really hot, from the lava and if you stand on one for more than two seconds you get burned.

RACHEL

One, two!

(Both girls jump from one piece of furniture to another.)

RACHEL

One, two!

(They jump again.)

RACHEL

One, two!

(They jump again.)

RACHEL

Sudden death mode! Whoever hits next wins!

(They redouble their efforts, while jumping every two seconds and avoiding the floor. Finally they hit each other at exactly the same time and fall to the floor.)

RACHEL

Ah!

STEPHANIE

Ah! Ah!

RACHEL

Loser tie!

(Finally they collapse on the floor, breathing heavily and sharing, for a moment, the joy of sisterhood. WILLIAM returns and surveys the damage.)

BILL

Um, hmmm, this doesn't look any better.

(STEPHANIE and RACHEL get up just a little sheepishly and they and WILLIAM put the cushions back in their proper places.)

BILL

(to RACHEL)

Off to bed with you.

(RACHEL skips out.)

STEPHANIE

I'm going to go work more on my college essay. Quality time with Servetus. Goodnight Dad.

BILL

Goodnight.

(BILL gets out the newspaper from somewhere in the room and begins to read it. OLIVIA reenters.)

BILL

(puts the paper down)

We should go to San Francisco.

OLIVIA

Yeah? Okay.

BILL

Okay.

(They regard each other. More thunder. Wind. Rain.)

END OF PLAY