

A FAMILY HISTORY BY NICHOLAS SGOUROS

*Lights up on a stage divided into three parts. Center stage is a cluttered desk with a computer on it. Stage Right is a makeshift tent in an Appalachian coal camp. In front of the tent a tree stump for a seat. Stage Left a very Seventies recliner.*

*PETE DONAHUE sits at the computer, a large glass of Root Beer in his hand.*

LIZ  
(off stage)

Honey, I'm home.

PETE

Oh, crap.

*Pete, quickly shuts off the computer monitor.*

LIZ  
(off stage)

Where are you?

PETE

Um... In here.

*LIZ DONAHUE, Pete's wife, enters. She is seven months pregnant.*

LIZ  
What are you doing?

PETE  
Just on the computer.

LIZ  
Then why's it off?

PETE  
Oh, it's not off. I just... shut the monitor off.  
Who'd you sub for today?

LIZ  
Mrs. Reed. Fourth grade. You looking for jobs?

PETE  
Sure am.

LIZ  
Any progress?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETE  
A few things look promising.

LIZ  
Can I see?

PETE  
See what?

LIZ  
Which Job Search Engine did you use?

PETE  
Oh, a whole bunch of different ones.

LIZ  
Well, turn the monitor on then.

PETE  
Uh, I can't.

LIZ  
Is it broken?

PETE  
No, but I've got a bunch of windows open and it just looks really confusing to someone who isn't familiar with my system.

LIZ  
Pete, we got that computer so you could look for jobs. Maybe work from home if you could. Not play online Scrabble all day and all night.

PETE  
I use the computer for more than just playing Scrabble, Liz.

LIZ  
You're still parked in front of it more than half the day.

PETE  
I'm reading and doing research.

LIZ  
Yeah, on fantasy baseball.

PETE  
Well, I'm not doing that now.

LIZ  
Then turn the monitor on.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETE

I can't.

LIZ

Then I pull the plug and put an end to your little cyber-Scrabble match.

PETE

No! Don't! Nothing's saved.

LIZ

I paid for the thing, I'll shut it off if I want.

PETE

Wait. Fine. I'll turn it on.

*Pete turns the monitor back on.*

LIZ

What is all that?

PETE

Surprise.

(pause)

Scroll to the top.

LIZ

(reading)

"A History of the Donahues of Appalachia."

PETE

It's the companion to "A History of the Franzettis of Appalachia." Which I've already finished.

LIZ

You did my family too.

PETE

It was easy the way your family talks.

LIZ

What's this for?

PETE

Well, since I ain't working and we're about to become a family, I thought I'd prepare a family history to pass on to our kids. And they can add to it and their kids can add to it. We may not be able to buy them the best and newest toys, but I can give them knowledge of who they are and where they came from.

LIZ

That's very sweet of you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PETE

I thought so myself.

*Pete reaches for his Root Beer, but misses entirely sending it crashing to the floor.*

PETE (CONT'D)

Darn it.

LIZ

Your eyes bothering you?

PETE

No.

LIZ

You grabbed for that Root Beer and missed it by a mile.

PETE

I've just been staring at the screen too long.

LIZ

Baloney. You drink so much Root Beer your sugar acts up and it's causing the blood vessels in your eye to leak. You ain't always been this clumsy, Pete.

PETE

Does my eye look bloody to you?

LIZ

You need an eye exam to tell for sure if you've got retinopathy.

PETE

Fat chance of that. And a substitute teacher's spouse doesn't get health insurance, in case you forgot.

LIZ

All the more reason for you to take this job I found you.

PETE

Excuse me? I can find a job myself.

LIZ

Pete, it's got insurance.

PETE

Just let me finish this project. I'm practically done.

LIZ

You need to see to finish that project.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

PETE

Fine, what is this job?

LIZ

They're looking for managers for the Superstore out on Route Eleven.

PETE

Is that some kind of joke?

LIZ

I know how you feel about those stores.

PETE

It's not about how I feel about them, Liz. Your family owned this town's General Store going back sixty years. And you want me to work for the business that turned it into condemned building?

LIZ

You'll get a discount. And they just built a big organic food section. We can afford that kinda food with the discount they give you.

PETE

Your father would never allow it.

LIZ

It's not up to him. Think of how healthy we can get.

PETE

You mean how healthy I can get.

LIZ

If you take the job you can get proper treatment for your diabetes.

PETE

I can take care of it myself.

LIZ

Obviously not.

PETE

Liz, I've just spent two months documenting what my family's been through since they left Ireland, and I've come to the realization that the Donahues are a hardy breed. I come from good stock.

LIZ

That doesn't make you indestructible.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

PETE

Take my great-granddaddy for instance. Lived in a tent for nearly a year during the strike of '21. Most families were going hungry, but he had the survival instinct.

*Lights shift to the tent.*

*MONA DONAHUE plucks a chicken.*

*Enter JOE DONAHUE. He carries a jug.*

JOE

Your champagne, madame.

MONA

Should go great with our caviar as soon as I'm done pluckin' it.

JOE

Boy-oh. Can't remember last time I had meat. Where'd you get it?

MONA

I got my ways.

JOE

That's why I married you Mona Donahue. I better get this bubbly on ice.

*Joe goes into the tent.*

JOE (CONT'D)

(from inside the tent)

Mona! Mona! We've been robbed.

*Joe comes out of the tent.*

JOE (CONT'D)

I can't believe it. Can't trust a soul any more.

MONA

Pipe down. We ain't been robbed.

JOE

I'm cleared out in there. You're supposed to be watching my supply.

MONA

I ain't left the tent all morning.

JOE

Then where'd all my sugar go?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

MONA

I traded it.

JOE

What?

MONA

All that dynamite you handled prior to this strike make you hard of hearing?

JOE

What? I'm... who'd you go trading all my sugar to?

MONA

One of the Italian women. Gave her all our sugar and now she's gonna come by with a fresh bird every other day for the next two weeks.

JOE

Why on earth would you do that?

MONA

Cuz' I'm tired of eatin' watered down root stew.

JOE

But I needed that sugar.

MONA

Nobody needs that much sugar.

JOE

That recipes been in my family for centuries. And it needs that much sugar.

MONA

Don't matter anyhow. You're tearing down that still.

JOE

That still ain't hurtin' nobody.

MONA

Tell that to Jimmy O'Conner.

JOE

Jimmy O'Conner cries a river when he stubs his toe. If he can't handle a hangover, that's no fault of mine.

MONA

He's gone blind.

JOE

That moonshine was clean if that's what everybody's thinking.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

JOE (CONT'D)

I filter every batch through charcoal and test it out myself so if any poor sap goes blind or croaks, that poor old sap is me.

MONA

He's going around the camp telling everyone you've brewed up a bad batch.

JOE

Company doctor told Jimmy last year that his spleen ain't working. He was always thirsty and his piss smelled like sugar. I'm sure that's what caused it.

MONA

How's a bad spleen gonna turn him blind?

JOE

I don't know, but the doc warned him it might happen if he didn't watch how much sugar he put into his body.

MONA

And I've seen how much sugar goes into a batch of your moonshine.

JOE

I'm just givin' the boys a little something they could never get at the company store.

MONA

I don't care if it was Jimmy's bum organs or one of your jugs that caused him to go blind, you're tearing that still down.

JOE

But it's in my blood.

MONA

I don't care if it's in your blood, the air you breathe, and the food you eat, you are tearing down that blasted still.

JOE

My mother would hee and haw at my daddy a hundred times louder and a thousand times more potent than any of your lamentations Ramona Bauer and he never tore down his still.

MONA

So I'm a Bauer now? You know my name's been Donahue since the day we were wed.

JOE

You could have married Saint Patrick himself and still wouldn't know thing one about being Irish.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

MONA

Well, this ain't Ireland. This is the hills.

JOE

And you know the same as I do the manner in which these hills were settled. Where the English went, they built a house; where the Germans went, they built a barn; where the Irish went, they built a whiskey still. Now do us both a favor and take your German-self and build us a barn, cuz I'm dead tired of sleeping in a teepee like I was a native.

MONA

That German blood means I'm handy with an axe. So if you don't tear down that still, I'll do it myself.

JOE

Don't you like the few extra dollars that still brings us?

MONA

I would if you spent it on something useful. 'Stead you just spend it on more sugar and cornmeal.

JOE

There's peace in lugging sacks of sugar and cornmeal up a hill. Fetching water from the stream. Letting that water boil and mixin' a mash. You'll never know the pleasure of sittin' on log and watching a mash turn sour over the course of a week. Only time I'm alone with only *my* thoughts running through my head.

MONA

Whatcha think about?

JOE

The land. How it can seemed cursed one moment. And how on an early morning with a light mist settling over the hills it can seem like the most beautiful place on Earth.

MONA

Yeah, I get them thoughts sometimes too.

JOE

My nerves get jumpy though when I heat that mash in the pressure cooker. Reminds me little too much of a picket line. But then I see the cold copper tube trap that moonshine and by God, I feel like a king. I made something. Little old me. Spend your whole life destroying with dynamite and pick axe, it feels good to create.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

MONA

Well, you been creatin' more than just moonshine of late.

JOE

What's that mean?

MONA

We've been run out of town. We're shot at and bullied by the company, and ain't got but a dime to our name. Things are bad enough without half the camp accusing you of turning Jimmy blind.

JOE

This strike ain't gonna last forever.

MONA

Maybe it will. Maybe it won't.

JOE

How long you know you was pregnant?

MONA

A few weeks I guess.

JOE

We wasn't planning this.

MONA

We wasn't planning on living in a tent either, now were we? Come inside and lie down with me. There's a lot more room with all them bags of sugar gone. And tomorrow I'll help you dismantle the still. Now pour out that jug.

*Joe grabs his jug from the ground. He pauses. Uncorks the jug and takes a long swig.*

JOE

You know where I'll be.

*Joe exits.*

*Lights shift back to Pete and Liz at the computer.*

PETE

Sure, he tore that still down before my granddad was born, but not before he'd put away enough cash to get them out of company housing once the strike was over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

LIZ

That's the lesson you want our kids to take away from that chapter?

PETE

When the going gets tough, the Donahues get going.

LIZ

Sounds to me like your great grandfather was a braver man than you realize.

PETE

How do you mean?

LIZ

I mean his wife asked him to make a sacrifice and he found the courage to do it.

PETE

You're still on about that job?

LIZ

I'm on about your future. And I'm afraid there isn't gonna be much of a future, unless you to get your sugar under control.

PETE

Other than a little tingle in my toes come night, I got it under control.

LIZ

That little tingle means it ain't under control. I can't wait to read this history, and find out if the men in your family have always been this stubborn.

PETE

Just the ones with nagging wives.

LIZ

Did Jimmy O'Conner ever get his vision back?

PETE

No.

LIZ

See what happens when you veer from doctor's orders.

PETE

I don't have a doctor.

LIZ

Take this job and you will.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

PETE

My resume is out there.

LIZ

Along with thousands of others.

PETE

I can't help it the job market's so lean.

LIZ

You've got a great opportunity staring you in the face.

PETE

But I don't like what I see.

LIZ

And neither do I. Because I see a husband and a father who won't take care of himself.

PETE

You're always overreacting. I've just been staring at the computer for too long.

LIZ

And you've been drinking Root Beer for too long, and you've been sitting in that chair not doing a bit of exercise, but to walk to the kitchen for a refill.

PETE

It's wears me out stressing over my health. And I got to look for a job on top of it. I just don't have the energy for much else.

LIZ

You used to love ridin' your bicycle. Can you even ride a bike anymore?

PETE

Of course, I can.

LIZ

The county built a fifteen mile bicycle path along the river last year. Why not take advantage of it?

PETE

Heck, I don't even know where my bike is.

LIZ

Probably by mine. We used to ride together, remember? And there's plenty of spots where we can stop and hike if we wanted. Pack a healthy lunch and have a picnic.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

PETE

If I take that job I won't have anytime for bike riding. You know the kinda lousy hours they keep over at the Superstore.

LIZ

It's called making time and that's what people who care about their families do. Think about if we have a little boy. You gonna tell him you're too busy playing computer games to teach home how to throw a football or take him fishing? Or worse yet, what if your legs go. The diabetes already causing poor circulation down in your feet. Give you them bunions and your hammertoe. But just a few small repairs around your diet and lifestyle and-

*Liz gets choked up.*

PETE

What? Honey? Listen, I'm sorry. Liz, baby?

LIZ

You got anything in that family history about your momma's wedding day?

PETE

You know my momma don't like to talk about her wedding.

LIZ

You know why?

PETE

Well, it was during another strike. Probably wasn't the million dollar bash she'd dreamed about.

LIZ

Your momma never cared for the high life.

PETE

If you two are so close why don't you write that chapter.

LIZ

You got to get her deep in her cups, but she'll open up about that day. And the reason she was unhappy with it had nothing to do with a strike.

*Lights shift to the recliner where PAT DONAHUE sits. His legs are amputated.*

PAT

He's roundin' third, heading home. The slide. He's safe!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

*LISA DONAHUE, his wife, enters and sets a telephone in his lap.*

PAT (CONT'D)

You missed it honey. An inside the park home run, the single greatest feat in baseball.

LISA

I need you to call in an order to Bogie's Liquor.

PAT

They deliverin' now?

LISA

Patrick Donahue, you know why you need to call.

PAT

I don't need to call. I got enough beer in the fridge the last me the second half of this double header. In fact, you mind bringing me one?

LISA

Don't make me turn that television off.

PAT

If I had my legs back I'd join the union softball league and be a base stealing fool.

LISA

The wedding's in less than two weeks.

PAT

I'm forty-seven years old. Heck, I could still be having kids. Instead, my daughter's getting married. God bless me, I'll be a grandfather within the year.

LISA

We like Tommy.

PAT

Speak for yourself.

LISA

And more importantly Francis loves him.

PAT

She's too young.

LISA

Franny's as old as we were when we wed.

PAT

We were too young.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

LISA

You don't mean that.

PAT

Me 'n B.J.'ll run down to Bogie's and pick up a keg before the service. Ice it down and by the time we arrive at the VFW it'll be nice and cold.

LISA

But I need you to reserve it now.

PAT

Reserve what? Bogie's always got kegs. They got it painted on the side of the building for cryin' out loud. In bright yellow lettering. "Always got kegs!"

LISA

Kegs of that cheap local swill. This is a wedding.

PAT

They're lucky they get a wedding. We didn't get a wedding. Said our "I dos" in front of a judge and I spent our honeymoon with a hundred G.I.s on boat in the South Pacific.

LISA

We're lucky Tommy's got such bad eyesight, or else he'd be spending his honeymoon in Vietnam.

PAT

Yeah, keeps him outta the mine too. Boy wouldn't know an honest day's work if he met it in line at the post office.

LISA

A Union Organizer works just as hard as any miner.

PAT

Works hard getting us to strike.

LISA

Why aren't you walking the picket line anyhow?

PAT

You know very well why I ain't walkin' it.

LISA

I'm sorry.

PAT

Don't apologize. It's not your fault I was born in a coal camp and was fed just enough to keep me alive.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (15)

PAT (CONT'D)

Then lived on potatoes for a year during the strike of '49. Poor diet caught up to me with a vengeance.

LISA

It's not the union's fault you lost your legs.

PAT

Better food coulda made me tougher.

LISA

Please, don't go off half cocked like this at the wedding.

PAT

I'll go off full cocked if I get drunk enough.

LISA

If you reserve the keg of Irish beer like they want, it might be worth it.

PAT

Imported beer's gonna cost two or three times more.

LISA

It's their wedding.

PAT

They want a keg of Irish beer so bad they can pay for it themselves.

LISA

Father of the bride pays for the wedding. You know that.

PAT

Your father didn't pay for ours.

LISA

That's cuz we weren't lucky enough to have a wedding.

PAT

My point exactly. Those two should count their blessings they're getting what they're getting.

LISA

We've got enough saved. It's within our budget.

PAT

It's not saved if we go blowin' it on some fancy pants beer. Who knows how long this strike's gonna last? Probably forever if it were up to Tommy. Gives that nearsighted dope something to do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (16)

LISA

Tommy's on your side, why can't you see that?

PAT

I like American beer. I'm not wastin' my money on a keg a beer that tastes like Grandma's handbag.

LISA

This wedding's not for you.

PAT

I know what this is about. Tommy put into Franny's head some crazy idea about going to Ireland for their honeymoon.

LISA

That's right. To see the land of their ancestors.

PAT

Hogwash. Their ancestors left that God forsaken land for this God forsaken land nearly two hundred years ago, for crying out loud. They think buying some fancy keg of imported beer will tie them over until they can afford the trip.

LISA

You think all Franny wants out of this wedding is a trip to Ireland?

PAT

She all but told me so herself.

LISA

Franny's down at the line right now. Picketing for your sake. Now where's your chair, we're gonna go ask her what she really wants for her wedding.

PAT

I'm in my chair.

LISA

The one with wheels.

PAT

It's busted. So I threw it in the trash.

LISA

How'd you get in here?

PAT

Pulled myself by my arms.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (17)

LISA

See what we're strikin' for now. Some descent health coverage so when a worker loses their legs, the company'll provide wheelchairs that work.

PAT

Yeah, well, we can't buy a fancy keg of beer cuz whatever extra cash we got is gonna go towards buying me a new chair. Okay?

LISA

Franny'll understand.

PAT

She's gonna have to.

LISA

This wedding ain't gonna be easy for her, you know? A keg of Irish beer's neither here nor there. She was really looking forward to dancing with her Daddy. Him in a tux and her in her gown. Been dreaming of that before she even started liking boys.

PAT

Well, life ain't a story book.

LISA

No, it's not.

PAT

She's getting a husband out of the deal, so it ain't all bad.

LISA

Think you can get ourself out to the car? I'd carry you, but I doubt I'm strong enough.

PAT

What for?

LISA

Go down to the picket line. I'll throw your busted chair in the back and we got proof of what that lousy health plan is all about.

PAT

I ain't goin'.

LISA

Franny and Tommy are down there now. Think of what it'll mean to them?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (18)

PAT

I ain't goin'.

LISA

Instead of a wedding gift. Just say something to the boys and their wives. It'll mean so much. They're out there striking 'cause of people like you.

PAT

People like me? What's so different about me?

LISA

Nothing.

PAT

Now take this phone away. I ain't makin' no calls today.

LISA

Can I take you down to the picket line?

PAT

Take this phone or I'll bust into more pieces than my wheelchair! Now outta my way. I got a baseball game to watch.

*Lisa takes the phone and exits.*

*Lights shift back to Pete and Liz at the computer.*

LIZ

The real reason your momma don't talk about her wedding day is because it was two months after your granddaddy caught the ugly end of a runaway shuttle car and lost both his legs. She couldn't dance with her daddy at her own wedding because of an *accident*. But if you lose your legs it won't be no *accident*. And if this baby inside of me is a girl and she won't be able to dance with her daddy at her wedding, it won't be no *accident*. And if you can't see the smiles on our children's faces the morning after Santa comes or at their high school graduation it ain't because of a bad batch of moonshine. You're the one in control here, Pete.

PETE

But it's hard.

LIZ

Of course it is. It ain't life if it ain't hard. That's what my daddy used to say. And it was hard for him to sell his store when the competition became too much.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (19)

LIZ (CONT'D)

Just like it was hard for your granddaddy to buy that keg of beer instead of a new chair. And just like it was hard for your great granddaddy to tear down his moonshine still. But it's making those hard choices in life that's kept us alive on this land. This land that no matter how beautiful it is, seems to have it out for us. You may have their histories typed out in an orderly fashion on that computer, but what good is it if you haven't learned from them?

PETE

Tell me what choice to make. I'll do it for you. For our family.

LIZ

I can't tell you what choices to make, Peter. You've got figure that out on your own. But know whatever choices you do make, I'll support you.

*Peter picks up his Root Beer cup.*

PETE

Pour this down the sink. And the rest of the two liters with it.

LIZ

You mean it?

PETE

And throw out the ice cream and the cookies. And what ever else may keep me from enjoying all the good things I got.

LIZ

Thank you.

PETE

I ain't gonna end up like the Jimmy O'Connors of the world.

LIZ

That's why I married you. No husband of mine would.

PETE

No Donahue either. And I may be awhile in the attic, so print out my resume for me, will you?

LIZ

What's in the attic?

PETER

Our bikes. I gotta do a lot of diggin', but they're up there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (20)

LIZ

We going for a ride?

PETER

That bike trail leads right past the Superstore, doesn't it? And when you're done printing my resume, dig up our Scrabble board. We can play a few games, out on the riverbank. I think I remember reading somewhere, that playing Scrabble's good for expecting mothers. Can that be right?

LIZ

I don't know if it is, but I like it anyway.

*Lights fade to black.*

*END OF PLAY*