

MERRIMACK REPERTORY THEATRE

2014-15 SEASON

# PLAYGUIDE



OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 16, 2014

# DUSK RINGS A BELL

by Stephen Belber

## AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN BELBER

Take a look at *Dusk Rings a Bell* from the playwright's angle.

## "A SIMPLE YEARNING"

A closer look at stuttering: What makes us do it, and how it affects our lives.

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Doing justice means more than crime and punishment.

## VICTIM EMPATHY

A prisoner's voice reaches out for healing.

## THE SIGHTS OF COASTAL DELAWARE

Vistas from the world of *Dusk Rings a Bell*.

Charles Towers, Artistic Director



Elizabeth Kegley, Executive Director

Dan & Mary Frantz, Honorary Producers

**OCTOBER 23 - NOVEMBER 16, 2014**

# DUSK RINGS A BELL

by Stephen Belber

Featuring

**D'ARCY DERSHAM**

**TODD LAWSON**

Scenic Designer  
**WILSON CHIN**

Costume Designer  
**DEBORAH NEWHALL**

Lighting Designer  
**JEFF ADELBERG**

Sound Designer  
**CARTER MILLER**

Stage Manager  
**CASEY LEIGH HAGWOOD**

Assistant Stage Manager  
**PETER CREWE**

Casting by

**ELISSA MYERS CASTING, PAUL FOUQUET, C.S.A.**

Directed by

**MICHAEL BLOOM**

DUSK RINGS A BELL is presented by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc. New York.

World Premiere Presented by Atlantic Theater Company, New York City, 2010.  
DUSK RINGS A BELL was developed at the Ojai Playwrights Conference, 2009.



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# PLAYGUIDE

## THE CAST OF *DUSK RINGS A BELL*



**D'ARCY DERSHAM** (*Molly*) **MRT:** Debut. **REGIONAL:** *The Sisters Rosenweig*, Portland Stage; *Social Creatures*, *House & Garden*, *A Christmas Carol*, Trinity Repertory Company; *The Libertine*, *Bridge Rep of Boston*; *The Whaleship Essex*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Hotline*, The Vineyard Playhouse; *Body Awareness*, *Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom*, Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theatre; *1:23*, Perishable Theatre. **EDUCATION:** D'Arcy received her MFA from Trinity Repertory Conservatory, and studied at École Internationale de Théâtre Jaques Lecoq.



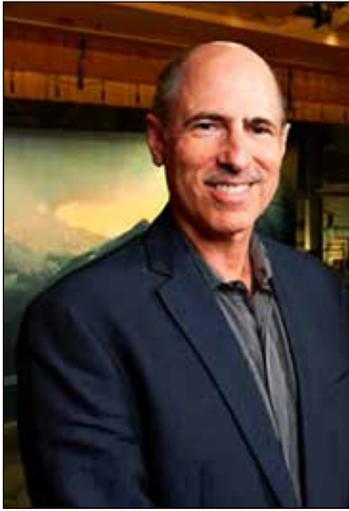
**TODD LAWSON** (*Ray*) **MRT:** Debut. **BROADWAY:** *Summer and Smoke*. **OFF-BROADWAY:** *One Arm*, *Levittown*. **NATIONAL TOUR:** *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. **REGIONAL:** Baltimore Center Stage, Studio Theatre, Pioneer Theatre Co., Playmakers Rep. Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Portland Stage, Vermont Stage, Hudson Stage, Delaware Theatre, John W. Engeman Theatre, Key West Theatre Festival, Bay Street Theatre, The Wilma and The Human Race Theatre Co. **FILM:** *Top Floor* (SXSW 2013), *Sides*, and *Guests of a Nation*.



Todd Lawson and D'Arcy Dersham get into character at a photoshoot by Meghan Moore, 2014.

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

**Michael Bloom** is a director, teacher, artistic director, and writer. This is his directorial debut at MRT.



It may surprise you to know that guest directors at most regional theatres, like actors, rarely have the opportunity to work on favorite projects. We are more often than not “artists for hire.” As former artistic director at Cleveland Play House, I mostly selected—out of necessity—projects without directors already attached.

Guest directors become accustomed to this system, finding an entry-point into the story they're hired to tell. But

directing a play to which one is already emotionally attached is usually easier and more exciting.

As artistic director of MRT, Charles Towers has had the enlightened idea of allowing directors to submit a handful of plays from which he selects the finalist. Charles took a liking to two of the plays I offered, with a special affinity to the one you'll see this evening. Although I'd recommended the play to other theatres, it was Charles who recognized its virtues.

Having worked on *Dusk Rings A Bell* in a reading at Cleveland Play House just before its premiere Off-Broadway, I was especially excited by Charles' enthusiasm. One of the many things that drew me to the script was its sense of surprise. All too often two character plays are “schematic” because there are seemingly a limited number of directions the story can take. *Dusk* defies the genre, opening as an insightful character study and blossoming into a wide-ranging, rich, and evocative tale. As our world grows increasingly precarious, stories of what could have been—the roads not taken—seem to be especially engaging. *Dusk* starts with a brilliant conceit that might have appeared in a New Yorker short story. But as he does in so many of his plays, Stephen Belber takes us on a journey that connects the personal and the social in the most startling of ways.

Michael Bloom  
Director

# Q&A: AN INTERVIEW WITH STEPHEN BELBER



**Stephen Belber** is a New York-based playwright and screenwriter. His other plays include *The Power of Duff*, *Match*, and *Carol Mulroney*. He was an associate writer/performer in Tectonic Theater Company's *The Laramie Project* and *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, which address the 1998 murder of gay University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard.

## How did you first get into playwriting?

As a young guy I wanted to be a novelist, but I had also acted in my high school, which had a really great program. So I eventually decided to try combining those two loves...and so I started doing one-person shows that were sort of prosaic and novelistic. And that got me into writing plays, beginning with one-acts, and then full-length.

## You've also written for film and for TV. Is there anything that you've found to be unique about the theatre specifically?

There are a lot fewer rules that you have to follow in theatre. You can ardently pursue your characters' journeys in a way that's more freeing. There are certain visual requirements in film, and also plot requirements, which to a certain extent can be limiting. Theatre is really the land of character, where they really get to run free and have fun. And you can do so many different things formally: the way you structure the play, direct address, achronological storytelling...all kinds of things—some of which you can do in movies, but in theatre it's a limitless terrain. So for its fun and freedom to experiment and push the boundaries, theatre keeps drawing me back.

Stephen Belber with the cast of *The Laramie Project* Cycle at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Photo by Julieta Cervantes. Printed with permission from Tectonic Theatre Company.



**You were one of the original creators and performers of *The Laramie Project*, which is now such an iconic part of the theatre cannon. What was it like to be a part of that? Did you realize at the time what it would eventually become?**

No, I don't think we knew it would be performed as often as it is. I think we knew that Moisés Kaufman's theatre company was sort of poised to do different work, that was approaching theatre in a docudrama type way wasn't being done that much, and that that was an exciting way to take on social justice issues, and...that it was a more direct approach that could maybe tap into something bigger while still employing theatrical techniques, both conventional and less-so.

It was an incredible experience for me—very, very formative and empowering; in many ways we really had to inquire whether theatre had a valid contribution to make to the national and even international conversation that was going on around that event, around Matt Shepard's death...and to sort of ask, "do we have anything positive and valuable to add to this discussion?" And we weren't sure of the answer. But the moment we got out there, we knew that we were finding raw, intense, beautiful and dark words from people directly and indirectly involved with what happened. We knew that this was different than what the press was doing and what the press was capable of doing—and we also knew that it was different than a documentary, which has its own, different approach to "what is the truth."

We were "theatre people," interpreting the words we heard, we were, ourselves, characters—which is what made us decide to put ourselves in as characters with inherently subjective views. We weren't claiming to be truth tellers; we were just trying to convey some of the very moving stuff that we heard. So all that to say...yeah, it was very cool to be a part of. It was exciting, and it was powerful to hear people speaking, unadulterated, to us about how they felt about being part of this event.

**How would you say that writing something like *Dusk Rings a Bell* is different from writing something like *The Laramie Project*?**

Well it's different because Tectonic (the theatre company behind *The Laramie Project*) is really not about a playwright going into a room and writing a play and coming out and having actors rehearse it. One of Tectonic's specialties is to go out and find a play, and create it in a rehearsal room: to

develop work—to develop a piece. And so, I came from the sort of more traditional playwright-goes-into-a-room mentality, and as much as I loved working on *Laramie* and want to continue that kind of work, I still love going into a room and writing a play.

*Dusk* was, for me, kind of an amalgam of both things. When we wrote the epilogue to *Laramie*, the *Ten Years Later* piece, I went down and I interviewed Russell Henderson, who was one of the perpetrators, three or four times. The first time was really for *Laramie*, and then I went back on my own—I was so intrigued by what I was hearing from Russell, and I knew I wanted to do something where I did go into a room and write, based on those conversations. And I guess you could say *Dusk Rings a Bell* largely came out of that: wanting to put that character on stage in a prolonged way, and in a fictional way where I could really take liberties with my own interpretation and experience of him...mostly because I was just so moved by a lot of what I was hearing. I was also disturbed by some of it, and I wanted to put it in a theatrical setting that would hopefully challenge audiences to think about how they think about people like that.

**Do you feel there's a core philosophical question in *Dusk Rings a Bell*?**

I wouldn't say a core philosophical question. I would say I was hoping to pull the rug out from beneath perceptions that we all have: predisposed perceptions of what a certain type of person, or who a certain type of person, is. And what their thought process is, and the room in their minds for greater thought than we might attribute to them...

Because the day in 1998, when I saw Russell Henderson's picture in the NY Times, the day after the crime, I thought a certain type of thing about that guy, who he was and [what he] represents, and what his background was...and yet the writer in me wanted to know more. I wanted to know all the details of that life, and it took me a long time to get them. But I think that it's a noble pursuit for all of us, with everyone in our life and outside of our life who we don't know, that before we lock in on a perception of "who this person is," that we do our due diligence and excavate and understand, because I think it will rarely be the same thing we thought it was going to be.

**One thing I find interesting about the play is that it only has two characters, it isn't very long, but it somehow feels expansive, and epic in a way. Do you see it that same way?**

Yeah, I mean I certainly wanted it to cover time, a fair amount of years. I feel like there is an epic sprawl to most humans' lives, simply because of the time that they're on this planet. And what's interesting to me is the way they change—or don't—or try to change over the course of time. It's a two-hander, not a huge theatrical extravaganza, but I did want to create an epic journey for them. And, you know, I think both characters are going through big emotional changes as we encounter them throughout the play. And that is exciting to me, and exciting to be able to do in a way that doesn't require a lot of lights and music and bells and whistles, but rather as the emotional equivalent of those things.

**There seems to be an ongoing theme of revisiting the past. What do you feel the perspective of hindsight gives to the characters in the play,**

## having so much to think about in what has happened in the years gone by?

I think that life can be rough, and it can be beautiful, but it scars us in many ways, and we cover up our scars, for the sake of survival: do what it takes to repair ourselves and keep moving forward. And it's not often—but when it does happen that we have the time, or the opportunity, or the excuse, or the reason to go back and unearth our pre-scarred selves, and get past the scar tissue that we built up for the sake of defense, and go back to something that was maybe more raw, and sometimes more alive, and fresh, and idealistic, to be able to access those moments in time, be they a quick moment or a stretch of years—it's formative, and really quite healthy even if it hurts.

And so that's why this play, and I think a lot of the stuff I try to write, has that theme of re-accessing a moment, or a thought, or a feeling that we used to have, and trying to see if there's still room for it in our life now, given the fact that often we've eliminated that feeling or covered it up. And I find it theatrical, for people to be able to scrape away the scar tissue and connect with who they were, for a second.



Arcky Derstham and Todd Lawson in *Dusk Rings a Bell*. Photo by Meghan Moore.

## What do you think is the fundamental attraction between Molly and Ray, and then the flip side of that: Where's the tension there that stops this from being a fairytale kind of a story?

The attraction is based in large part on this memory that they share, and it was a golden memory, and it was beautiful. It was one of those things that we all have and look back on and cherish. So much has happened to each of them since then. And the play's really about...yeah, can you go back and have a fairytale ending when you unearth that memory of who you were for a second? The tension in the play is in the shifts that have gone on in their individual lives since then. The scar tissue is very hard to remove. Particularly for Molly,

given her own scar tissue, to see past what Ray has done, to see how Ray has tried to recover, which I think she finds beautiful and noble, but she can't get past what he did...the crime he participated in. And try as she might, in the end she can't go back and actually inhabit that world fully because...well, because of who she is, and because of the extent of that crime. She just can't synthesize the two.

## Is there a reason you chose to set the play in Delaware, of all places?

I'm from Washington DC, and I remember when my uncle had a house in Rehoboth—or Bethany, rather, which is next to Rehoboth—those beach towns were sort of iconic for DC folks in the 80's when I was growing up. I like the idea of Molly being a DC person now, but also back then: that this is where she would have gone. They're sort of remote, and they're sort of beautiful and forlorn in the winter, and it just felt right.

I actually started writing this play ten years ago, as just a monologue—you know, the monologue it opens up with now, with Molly—it was just that. I was writing for an actress who needed a monologue, and I just started writing this thing. And then at the very end of it, this sort of ghostlike figure came in, and you don't know if he's a ghost from her past, or if he's a real person. So I had this piece of writing I had never done anything with. And then when I started talking to Russell Henderson, and I knew I wanted to write about him, I looked at this thing, and I thought, "well, what if you took that ghost character, and made him 'Ray?'" That's the genesis of it—but I always had that beach-thing monologue sitting around.

## You've had a pretty rich work life outside of writing—both as an actor, and then outside of theatre altogether. Have any of those experiences influenced your writing?

I thought it was really healthy to always maintain a distance, even when I knew I wanted to take up writing full time. I had sort of come from a family of journalists, so I loved working as a journalist, both in DC and in New York, and I absolutely loved working as a waiter and a bartender and a cater waiter and all that stuff, just because...you know, a lot of those folks are theatre folks, but a lot of them aren't. I loved meeting them. My favorite job was working for a couple years as a substitute teacher in the New York City school system. The folks who I met and the experiences I had were hugely formative for what I wanted to write about, but also for how I see life.

## Is there a project that you've always wanted to work on, or a person you've always wanted to work with?

I want to find anything I really love, and I want to make sure that I don't take jobs that I don't love. And it's really just about... my desire to write things that are a part of this world, and contribute to a sort of a larger discussion that goes beyond just entertainment, without being pretentious about it. *Laramie* being obviously a great example of something that really creates discussion in the community where it's done. A lot of the stuff doesn't do that, and I want to keep gravitating toward whatever does. That can take any form—theatre, film, TV—and it can take any subject matter that people want to talk about, think about, and hear about. I'd love to contribute to those discussions, whatever they are.

# “A SIMPLE YEARNING”

Molly in *Dusk Rings a Bell* is a grown woman who stuttered as a child and adolescent. And though she no longer does, she acknowledges that her stutter—and the experience of overcoming it—has shaped her life in the years between.

She explains how and when she stopped stuttering, but has much less to say about how she started.

There is no clear, easy answer to the question “why do people stutter?” The causes are enormously complex, and new research continues to unearth information. Several different theoretical models provide different insight into the reasons, but not a clear answer. The Stuttering Foundation suggests four likely causes which contribute to stuttering. These include **genetics**, **child development**, **neurophysiology**, and **family dynamics**. However, rather than lumping together all the contributing factors as “causes,” it is helpful to break them into pre-disposing factors (the circumstances that make someone more likely to stutter) and triggering factors (what pushes someone predisposed to actually develop a stutter).

Molly says about the roots of her condition:

**“Stuttering—besides in some cases being a neurophysiologic genetic disorder...”**

Some predispositions have been shown to be genetic. It is significantly more prevalent in males than females, it tends to run in families, and there are strong correlations in sets of identical twins: if you have an identical twin who stutters, there is an 80%-90% chance that you will stutter as well.

Neurophysiologic predispositions also exist. Wiring of the brain plays in: some theories suggest that stutterers are using the right side of their brain for speech (instead of the left side, like usual) because of delayed development of the left side. Theories also suggest that some stutterers have a deficit in temporal programming, or the timing of their speech movements: it takes longer for their brains to take their thoughts and “program” them as muscular movements of the mouth.

**“...is, in others, almost symbolically, a simple yearning for mature articulation.”**

One who stutters may be struggling with external social pressures to communicate in a certain way. Pressure to compete for a turn to speak in a conversation, embarrassment about normal speech issues, the need to speak about a traumatic event—all may be triggers.

A stutterer, in these situations, may strive to communicate a fully realized idea, under circumstances that impede their full, mature expressive potential.

**“Developmental stuttering is often in part due to a child’s desire for communication outstripping their current skill set. A great and guttural need to self-express, impeded by a lack of linguistic chutzpah—because that’s really what it is: The motor skills can’t keep up with the highly emotional explosion that’s occurring inside.”**

Of the four prevailing theories of why people stutter, the one Molly seems to identify with is the **“Capacities and Demands Theory.”** Imagine four lanes of backed up traffic merging into one: rather than driving smoothly and effortlessly, the cars will have to stop and start, negotiating for a turn to move into the one lane.



Molly, played by D’Arcy Dersham, struggled with her stutter as a child but no longer shows signs of the condition. Photo by Meghan Moore.

## WISHES OF A 15-YEAR-OLD

In *Dusk Rings a Bell*, Molly reads a letter she once wrote to herself as a young teenager, expressing her hopes for her future.

A true-life, anonymous 15-year-old’s wishes for her future appear below:

- To not stutter.*
- To be the most fluent speaker possible.*
- To be able to say what I want to say, how and when I want to say it.*
- To not have to think of what to say.*
- To accept what I say and how I say it.*
- To not base moods on how others react to what I say.*
- To want people to always like what I say at times.*
- To know how people are going to react.*
- To not be afraid of speaking in certain situations.*
- To increase my knowledge of stuttering techniques.*

Speech can function similarly: a stutterer may have four “lanes” of words in her head, but only a narrow speech outlet for those words; the result, as with the cars, is one of stopping and starting. Contrary to the common perception that stuttering reflects a linguistic deficit, in the Capacities and Demands model the problem is often the opposite: the stutterer’s vocabulary is too large for her speaking abilities. Stuttering often shows up in children after a rapid expansion of their vocabulary, before the physical means of expression have caught up; given the highly-developed vocabulary Molly exhibits throughout the play, it certainly seems plausible that she would identify.

The triggers mentioned earlier could present increased demands in this model: in addition to those of vocabulary, one could face even higher demands if they feel pressure to talk over others, have to give an oral presentation, speak to someone who intimidates them, or speak very quickly in order to be heard.

Whatever the causes may be, it is common for many children to feel negatively about their disorder. Scott, a 14 year old student who was receiving speech therapy, reflects on all the things he hates about his stutter:

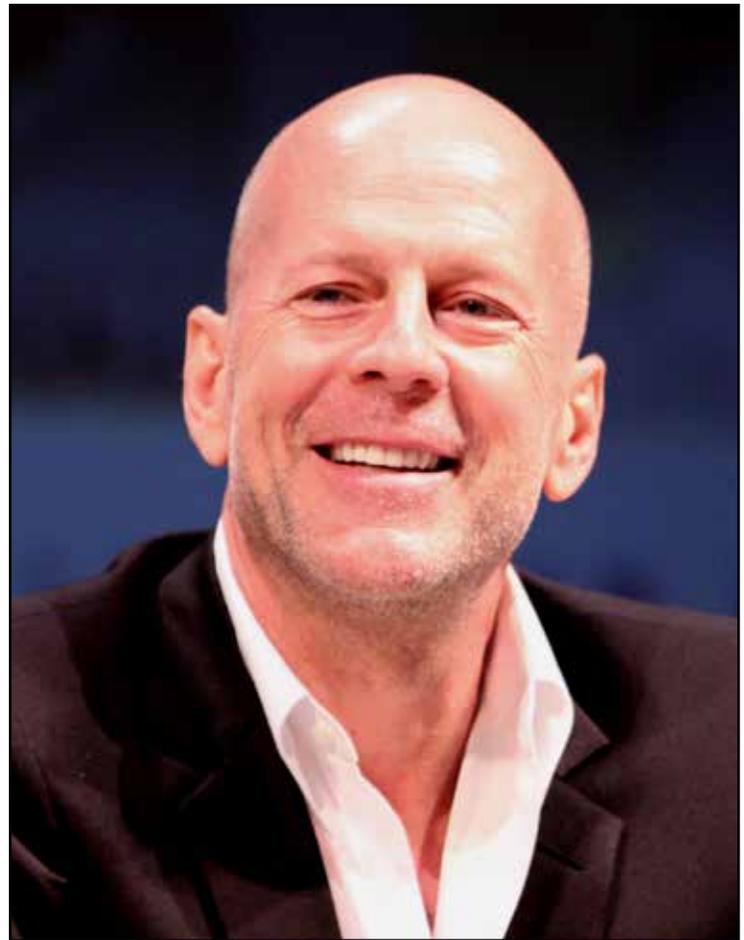
- **It calls attention to me**
- **I hate how it feels**
- **I hate how I worry about ordering food**
- **I hate how unpredictable it is**
- **I hate how it makes me feel embarrassed**
- **I hate how I feel out of control**
- **I hate how it’s hard to tell jokes**
- **I hate how people look at me**
- **I hate how I choose to not talk sometimes**
- **I hate how much I hate my stuttering! And**
- **I hate how easy talking is for everyone else!!!**

While many children overcome speech disfluencies on their own, others find help in therapy and supportive home environments. For parents raising a child who stutters, providing a calmer, less hurried lifestyle is often helpful. Also helpful is speaking slower, and allowing them to finish their own thoughts fully.

Still others don’t overcome speech disfluencies at all, and carry them into adolescence. They may compensate by adopting shorter, less complex sentence structures, or choosing generic words, like “thing” or “stuff,” instead of struggling to say what they really mean. Though some may still perform well in school, others may not: some of the most foundational academic and social skills can be affected by expressive language disorders which impact one’s ability to convey thoughts, ideas, and feelings completely. The ability to organize and categorize data, to form narratives—even to use and understand the slang of their peers, can be affected by such language disorders. Furthermore, the characteristics of adolescents with language disorders tend to line up with the characteristics of those at risk for delinquency, substance abuse, and suicide: increased behavior problems, being ignored or teased by peers, reduced participation in extracurricular activities, and more.

Even so, plenty will live healthy and successful lives.

Although Molly stuttered as a child and teenager, as an adult she shows little signs of her former condition. Examples



*Bruce Willis overcame a childhood stutter through acting. Photo by Gage Skidmore: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce\\_Willis#mediaviewer/File:Bruce\\_Willis\\_by\\_Gage\\_Skidmore.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bruce_Willis#mediaviewer/File:Bruce_Willis_by_Gage_Skidmore.jpg)*

of real-life parallels abound: Actors James Earl Jones, Nicole Kidman, and Bruce Willis all were once stutterers. Willis recently stated to the New Zealand Herald:

**“The Cub Scout years, I had a terrible stutter... But then I did some theater somewhere, probably in high school. And when I memorized words, I didn’t stutter, which was just miraculous. That was the beginning of the gradual dispelling of my stutter. I thought I was handicapped. I couldn’t talk at all. I still stutter around some people now.”**

Molly’s story is one among thousands: there are as many possible roots of a stutter as there are individual experiences, and as many possible outcomes as well.

*Sources:*

- HomeSpeechHome.org*
- StutteringHelp.org, Frequently Asked Questions: [www.stutteringhelp.org/faq](http://www.stutteringhelp.org/faq)*
- The School Age Child Who Stutters: Working Effectively with Attitudes and Emotions: A Workbook. Kristin A Chmela and Nina Reardon 2012 5th Ed.*
- “Bruce Willis Talks Sobriety, Stuttering, and his Oscar Drought.” New Zealand Herald, Feb. 14, 2013. [http://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1501119&objectid=10865232](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/news/article.cfm?c_id=1501119&objectid=10865232)*
- An Introduction to Children with Language Disorders. Vicki A. Reed, 3rd Ed.*

# RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: AN OVERVIEW

*Dusk Rings a Bell* raises issues of criminal accountability and “victim restoration.” **Restorative Justice** practices provide some answers to the questions posed by the play.



Holman Correctional Facility, Alabama. A restorative exercise from this facility is featured on pages 11 and 12. [www.state.al.us](http://www.state.al.us)

As an alternative to *retributive justice* (the system of crime and punishment most of us are familiar with), restorative justice shifts the focus of where justice is due: rather than the offender “getting what they *deserve*” (be that a fine, a prison sentence, death), everyone involved gets what is *needed* to repair the damage done to human relationship. For the offender, that might be accountability, a sense empathy for their victim, or the encouragement to change for the better; for the victim and the community, it might be empowerment, restitution, information, or the chance to make their voice heard. The hope through any restorative process is not merely to punish, but to make things right.

Several principles guide restorative justice thinking:

**Crime is a violation of people and interpersonal relationships, as opposed to violation of law and the state.**

Crime in the U.S. is seen as an offense against the state or political body; court cases are typically titled *State v. Offender*. This can diminish the value of the victim’s needs: the primary harm done is not to the state, but to the humans affected, and their relationships.

**Violations create obligations.**

When a crime is committed, there is a tear in the societal fabric rending the sense of community well-being. Even with the imposition of punishment, still something is left broken. With restorative justice, the offender must acknowledge responsibility and take steps towards fixing it.

**Justice involves victims, offenders, and community members in an effort to make things right.**

In the U.S. legal system, offenders are rarely encouraged to think about the impact of their actions; indeed, the court system incentivizes convincing a jury of one’s innocence, rather than owning one’s guilt. Because the state is so powerful, the individual offender most often remains silent, shielded by Due Process laws while the state uses its many resources to prove guilt. And in the case of a plea bargain, the offender does not truly assume an obligation for their actions; the bargain is,

rather, designed to move the case quickly through the system.

Restorative processes are typically employed at the front end of the legal system. But prisons themselves, in the U.S. and across the world, have begun to institutionalize restorative programs. Daniel W. Van Ness, of Prison Fellowship International, breaks them into six categories, by objective:

## 1. SEEK TO HELP PRISONERS DEVELOP AWARENESS AND EMPATHY FOR THEIR VICTIMS.

Some prisoners will think generally about victimization, considering the times they themselves (or their families) have been victimized. Others will engage with “surrogate victims:” victims of other, similar crimes. Still others will write letters of apology to their victims; often, these are not delivered due to state restrictions.

## 2. REQUIRE, OR MAKE IT POSSIBLE, FOR PRISONERS TO MAKE AMENDS TO THEIR VICTIMS.

The remedy is mutually determined and carefully tailored to repair the specific harm caused. As an example, prisoners might raise money for restitution for a theft through community work, specifically where the theft occurred.

## 3. FACILITATE MEDIATION BETWEEN PRISONERS AND THEIR VICTIMS, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THEIR COMMUNITIES.

With the consent of both victim and offender, in-person meetings are facilitated between the offender and those affected. That often means the victim and others affected by the harm, including the offender’s family and other members of the community.

## 4. STRENGTHEN TIES BETWEEN PRISONS AND THE COMMUNITIES IN WHICH THEY ARE SITUATED.

Public awareness activities, public volunteer work in prisons, and community service projects strive to bridge the divide between the prisoner and the free world.

## 5. CREATE A CULTURE IN WHICH CONFLICT IS RESOLVED PEACEFULLY.

This can mean peaceful conflict resolution between many parties: the most obvious being between prisoners and other prisoners. But efforts also have been made to address conflict between prison staff members, which has in some cases improved their ability to work with prisoner conflicts. This extends even into dealing with prisoners’ grievances against staff.

## 6. CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE PRISONER’S ENTIRE SELF MAY BE TRANSFORMED.

Called the “Virtuous Prison” by many, its hope is to ultimately foster moral goodness in its inmates. Prisoners are seen as having an *obligation* to become virtuous; and in reciprocity, the prison has an obligation to facilitate that transformation.

Sources:  
*Restorative Justice in a Prison Community: Or Everything I Didn’t learn in Kindergarten I learned in Prison* by Cheryl Swanson.  
*Restorative Justice in Prisons* by Daniel W. Van Ness. Prison Fellowship International Centre for Justice and Reconciliation.

# VICTIM EMPATHY

In his interview with MRT (page 7), playwright **Stephen Belber** stated:

*"I was hoping to pull the rug out from beneath perceptions that we all have: predisposed perceptions of what a certain type of person, or who a certain type of person, is... I think that it's a noble pursuit for all of us... that before we lock in on a perception of 'who this person is,' that we do our due diligence and excavate and understand, because I think it will rarely be the same thing we thought it was going to be."*

*Dusk Rings a Bell* can challenge our perceptions of what makes someone bad or good—and who is, or is not, capable of empathy.



*Pen and Paper. Photo by Dwayne Bent:  
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/zengei/6943077858/>*

Many prison-based restorative justice programs include exercises in **Victim Empathy**. Some of those exercises involve writing a letter to the victim. Though the letter may not actually be delivered, it is a useful exercise for the offender to take ownership of their actions and see their crime from the victim's perspective, as in the following exercise from the Holman Correctional Facility Faith-Based Honor Dorm in Alabama:

**In one empathy and accountability course inmates are required to write three letters. The first is the letter of apology to the victim. In the second letter the offender places himself in the role of his victim, responds to the initial apology letter, and asks the offender (himself) questions. In the third letter the inmate answers his victim's letter.**

*Letters 5a through 5c are a complete set for this assignment.*

## Letter 5a

To the ---- family,

Hello. This is ---- and I'm not really sure how to begin this letter. I can never even come close to knowing the pain I've caused your family. And to say I'm sorry for what I've done, or to express any words of remorse, may sound hollow and cheap.

But I must say something and with all my heart I must ask your forgiveness. A forgiveness which I neither deserve or rarely expect you are able to give.

But of one I still must ask. Words are at a loss for me, for what can I say to someone who has lost so much.

And I pray that even this small effort will help you in some way.

And though I write this mainly with you in heart and mind, I would be dishonest if I were not to tell you that it is also partly for me. And I ask you to forgive me for that also. But I must live with the hurt I have caused your family. I have wept many nights for the pain I have caused. But I know I cannot and will not ever come close to the tears and grief your family have [sic] shed.

I am almost ashamed of mentioning myself in this letter but I want it to be as honest as possible. I also want to say that if you have any questions whatsoever I will answer them with all honesty, hiding nothing.

And in closing I want to tell you that I pray for your family on a daily basis. I hope you can except [sic] that of me, but if not I understand and hope I haven't hurt you more by saying it.

May God be with you, ----

## Letter 5b

Mr. ----,

To say I was shocked when I received your letter is an understatement. And at first I wasn't going to respond at all and even why I am at this time is a mystery to me.

You were correct in saying that you can't imagine the pain you caused me and my family, even after the 25 years that pain is still fresh. It's a living thing that will most likely be with me till my last breath. And I HATE you for causing it. And I want you to endure as much pain as I have.

You ask for forgiveness in your letter, but I don't see that as a possibility. My Bible tells me I should but I don't really see it happening. I'm human not God.

But I think you are truly remorseful of what you did. That is most likely the only reason I'm writing this at all. And you should be remorseful for that evil act

You said you would answer any of my questions. Well I have many, but can't bring myself to ask you yet. They hurt too much.

Even writing this little bit is very difficult. But the more I write the more I think I might want to meet you if to do nothing else but to spit in your face and allow you to see the pain you have caused.

Maybe some day I can do as you ask and forgive to some degree. But it will take God to do it, for I cannot.

*Even though the inmate does not have his victim ask specific questions, in the reply letter he writes as though the victim asks for clarification about what happened.*

## Letter 5c

Hello ----,

I'm not really sure of myself here. I don't want to cause you more pain than I already have but you said you wanted to know.

I hope you don't feel I'm dodging here but I really don't remember much about that day. I remember pulling in the

Ray, played by Todd Lawson, went through a victim restoration program that included writing a letter like the ones shown.



## VICTIM RESTORATION

*"...I'm not saying it goes away, I'm saying that there's work you can do, on your end, to, to trace the steps you took to where you were able to commit a violent act. To identify things you didn't realize were violent, like the first time you witnessed violence, and... and how that led to permitting it, and then to calling someone a fag--anything that you maybe never realized was assaultive..."*

*"...the thing is it is possible to have meaningful restoration, within the framework of governmental or community action."*

- Ray, *Dusk Rings A Bell*

parking lot of the bank and picking ---- up but after that point it's pretty much a blank. I was high on the drug PCP so I really wasn't thinking at all of what we were really doing. ---- ran it down to me and I just said okay and it happened. It was as if I were in a bad dream. What I know of what happened mostly comes from my partner. We drove to where they were killed and he shot them. I didn't and probably couldn't have shot them, but I was there and I have and always will feel guilty of what happen [sic] and except [sic] the total blame of that day. The pain of what happened lives with me every day and I feel the pain and hurt for those I have hurt because of this. First of all for you and your family, but I also hurt many members in my family also. Many members in my family won't except [sic] that I was involved at all. Even though I've told them it was so.

The pain and hurt I've caused your family is almost more than I can comprehend. And I know you may not even want me to but I pray for you and your family regularly.

I don't know what I can do if anything to ever right this wrong. All I can do that I know of is pray for you. For it is God alone that can right this type of wrong or heal this type of pain. I pray that God works this miracle for you and your family.

Reprinted from *Restorative Justice in a Prison Community: Or Everything I Didn't Learn in Kindergarten I Learned in Prison* by Cheryl Swanson. Published by Lexington Books, a division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.  
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# SIGHTS OF COASTAL DELAWARE

*Dusk Rings a Bell* is set in **Bethany Beach, Delaware**; the play also references events in **Rehoboth Beach**. Like many Mid-Atlantic beach towns, both municipalities were founded as centers of spiritual retreat, in the late 19th/early 20th centuries. They remain vacation and leisure destinations, especially for residents of the Baltimore and Washington D.C. areas.

Right: Bethany Beach Boardwalk in late winter, the setting of *Dusk Rings a Bell*. The town covers 1.15 square miles and has a population of only about one thousand, though many more visitors arrive in the summer months. Photo by Lee Cannon.



The Chesapeake Bay Bridge, on the route from Washington DC to the Delaware coast. Photo by Mike DelGaudio.



Breakwater Lighthouse at nearby Henlopen State Park in Lewes. Photo by Susan Sharpless Smith.



Rehoboth Beach Boardwalk. Rehoboth is similar to Bethany in land area, but larger in population and a busier center of activity. Photo by Susan Smith.



Lifeguard at Bethany Beach. Photo by Scott Gore.



Rehoboth Beach at Dusk. Photo by Brendan.



Sources:  
 Town of Bethany Beach: [townofbethanybeach.com](http://townofbethanybeach.com)  
 City of Rehoboth Beach: [cityofrehoboth.com](http://cityofrehoboth.com)  
 City-data.com

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS IN DUSK RINGS A BELL

**CHESAPEAKE BAY BRIDGE:** Major dual-span bridge over the Chesapeake Bay, connecting Maryland's Eastern and Western shores. The most direct route from Washington, DC towards to Atlantic Ocean; not to be confused with the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, which crosses the Bay's mouth in Virginia.

**COCCYX:** The triangular bone at the lower end of the spinal column; tailbone.

**DEPRESSION-ERA DAM:** One of the dams built starting in 1933 by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Dams were built in an effort to control flooding, improve navigation, and produce electrical power along the Tennessee River, in hopes of improving living conditions and stimulating economic recovery.

**GIBRALTAR:** British overseas territory in southern Spain. Characterized by its 1,398-foot rock promontory, it is a symbol of strength and power.

**KHMER ROUGE:** Genocidal Cambodian Communist regime, in power from 1975-1979. The Khmer Rouge was responsible for the deaths of approximately 1.7 million Cambodians in its attempt to transform the country into a strictly agrarian, collectivized society.

**MENSCH:** In Yiddish, literally "human being." A person of integrity and honor.

**NEUROPHYSIOLOGIC:** Concerning the nervous system's functions, activities, and physical or chemical phenomena.

**NIRVANA:** Alternative rock band and icon of the Grunge movement that emerged from Seattle in the early 1990's.

**POETRY SLAM:** Competitive format for Spoken-word poetry. Now widespread, it emerged in the 1980's from a Chicago-based movement to revive poetry and bring it back to the people.

**PTSD:** Post-traumatic stress disorder, an emotional condition that follows a traumatic event, especially one that involves serious bodily injury, the threat of death, or intense feelings of fear, helplessness, and horror. Symptoms often include a feeling of emotional numbness, increased anxiety and vigilance, and the re-experiencing of the trauma through flashbacks.

**QUOTIDIAN:** Ordinary; everyday.

**REALPOLITIK:** A pragmatic approach to politics, based on power and practicality rather than ideology.

**SOUTH AFRIKANER:** The South African ethnic group descended predominantly from white Dutch settlers.

**TCHAIKOVSKY:** Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, romantic-era Russian composer known for his deeply emotional and expressive music. Works include *Swan Lake* and *The Nutcracker*.

**ULYSSES:** Novel by James Joyce. Employing stream of consciousness writing and other unconventional techniques, it is notoriously challenging to read and also considered one of the greatest works in modernist literature.

## SUGGESTED FURTHER READING AND VIEWING

### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

- *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* by Howard Zehr (Book)
- *Transcending: Reflections of Crime Victims* by Howard Zehr (Book)
- *Doing Life: Reflections of Men and Women Serving Life Sentences* by Howard Zehr (Book)
- *Restorative Justice in a Prison Community: Or Everything I Didn't Learn in Kindergarten I Learned in Prison* by Cheryl Swanson (Book)

### STUTTERING AND EXPRESSIVE LANGUAGE DISORDERS

- *Out With It: How Stuttering Helped Me Find My Voice* by Katherine Preston (Book/Memoir).
- *V-V-Voice: A Stutterer's Odyssey* by Scott Damian (Book/Memoir).
- *The Thing Is, I Stutter*: Megan Washington at TEDx Sydney 2014 (Available TEDx YouTube Channel).
- The Stuttering Foundation: [www.stutteringhelp.org](http://www.stutteringhelp.org)

### OTHER

- *The Laramie Project* and *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later* by Moisés Kaufman (Play/Docudrama)

## SPECIAL THANKS

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