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"If I Didn't Ever Have To Come Down, I Wouldn't": My Process in Preparing and Playing Walter Griffin in Bridget Carpenter's Up

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PREPARING AND PLAYING WALTER GRIFFIN IN BRIDGET CARPENTER’S UP

“IF I DIDN’T EVER HAVE TO COME DOWN, I WOULDN’T”: MY PROCESS IN
PREPARING AND PLAYING WALTER GRIFFIN IN BRIDGET CARPENTER’S UP

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Drama

By

Jared Taylor Hanlin
University of Louisville
Bachelor of Science in Theatre Arts, 2009

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University of Arkansas

ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of my actor's process for creating and performing the lead role of Walter Griffin in Bridget Carpenter's contemporary drama *Up*. It is composed entirely of journal entries detailing my preparation and observations from the beginning of the audition process (August 22, 2011) through the closing of the show (October 9, 2011) and ending with reflective evaluations after closing. *Up* was produced by the University of Arkansas Department of Drama at the University Theatre and directed by Amy Herzberg.

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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I would like to thank our cast, crew and creative team for their two to seven weeks (or longer) of hard, fast work on this production. Special thanks to my immediate performance family: Amy Herzberg, Shannon Webber, Mason Azbill, Liam Selvey, Jordan Scott, Echo Sibley, Carley Tisdale, Hannah Maxwell, and Karlin McKee. Thank you for making this the most exciting and rewarding acting experience of my career thus far. This show was truly special.

I would also like to thank ZFX, Patrick Stone, Joseph Roller, Emily Ryan Breakell, Justin Spaethe, and Nick Savin for literally taking me “up” every night of the run and making sure I came back down safe and sound.

Lastly, thank you Drew Johnson for proposing *Up* to the season selection committee in the fall of 2009.

DEDICATION

This thesis and the performance it represents are dedicated to:

My loving and devoted wife, Shannon Hanlin

&

The memory of Larry Walters, whose curious life and tragic death inspired such a
wonderfully uplifting and heartbreaking story

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I. THE ACTOR'S JOURNAL

A. *Callback Auditions*

August 22, 2011 – I entered into these auditions having read *Up* a few times and I know that I want to play Walter. What strikes me most about this story is how much love Walter has for his family and his dream of flying. What he wants feels so simple and important and it hurts my heart that his values are ultimately incompatible. For the audition, I wanted to focus on these competing values. I wanted to expose the truest part of myself possible, and this is where my values and Walter's values seem to be most similar – love of family and love of a dream.

In reading the first scene of the play, I played with the actions of making Mikey feel loved and excited about the new invention. I felt that the major shift came when Walter is told that the “ultralite” has already been invented. I wanted to live that turn for disappointment as fully as possible and really take in that news while trying to keep Mikey from seeing how badly the news hurts. At the same time, I was trying to work against a couple of my actor habits. I have a tendency to both push with my voice because it feels like playing a strong action, and manipulating my voice to express my inner life rather than allowing my voice to do what it will based on the inner life that exists at any given moment (though the habit is strongest during moments of high emotion). I am not sure I was always successful at leaving my voice alone during these reads. I will need to continue to pay attention to this.

Not surprisingly, during the first callback we went from reading the first scene of the play where everyone is relatively happy with one another to reading Scene Twelve where Walter's lie is exposed and the script tends to suggest a shouting match with lines overlapping and typed in all capital letters. This scene was particularly difficult to read without wanting to get nasty in

action choices and after the first time through, the director, Amy Herzberg, asked for the adjustment of fighting for Helen, not against her. What I did feel pretty good about though was Walter's turn once Helen had left. I felt I did a good job of letting the fear of losing her set in and create new action choices for addressing Mikey, wanting him to feel that Walter had everything under control but really failing to do so.

We also got to read part of Scene Fifteen, with the family standing outside the burned down house. For this scene, I imagined watching my own childhood home in Crestwood, Kentucky burn to the ground. I visualized what it would be like never to get to walk through that house or to sit in the living room with my family ever again. I imagined what it would be like to see what still truly feels like home to me completely destroyed and to know that it was my fault. I read the scene from that place and felt completely charged with inner life. In this scene, Walter lashes out at Mikey and hurts him, then realizes what he has done and tries to comfort him. This was really challenging for me. Even getting to read it a couple of times, I do not think I lived that moment as well as I wanted to.

August 25, 2011 – We had the second round of callbacks tonight, and the field has narrowed. I feel like Amy is really looking for a Walter who deeply feels the struggle between the need he has for his dream and his need for his family's love. I continued to focus on that tonight, possibly leaning more towards needing the family's love. Having worked with all of the actors reading for Helen and Mikey really made establishing and fighting for those relationships easier, especially in Scene 1. Reading separately with Shannon Webber and Rebecca Rivas, I was able to find really fun moments of how Walter and Helen interact playfully, lovingly; these are the moments that will make the audience want this marriage to succeed. Tonight, Mason Azbill was the only actor reading for Mikey and he always brings so much to play with in every

reading. We had been working on cold reading techniques in class this week, and I was trying to utilize those tips as often as possible. This included making sure I was up and out of the script as often as possible – especially at the ends of my lines into the beginning of my partner’s and at the ends of my partner’s lines. We do this so that the director can see us sourcing and living in relationship to what is being said in moments of evaluation that spur action choices.

Scene Fourteen was my favorite scene to read. The flow of Bridget Carpenter’s dialogue just feels so right in so many ways. Again, I focused on making sure that the way I, as Walter, felt about Helen and Mikey was incredibly strong and I allowed the frustration of Walter’s faults and failures to seep in and color the actions I would play, making them feel loved and valued above all else. What is interesting about this scene is that this is where Walter’s anger is really supposed to come out. It is the first time he has any all-capitalized lines. “*DO YOU WANT TO TALK, OR JUST POINT OUT HOW STUPID I AM!*” (Carpenter 2.14.22) really resonates with me. To me, it feels like Walter is lashing out at himself rather than Helen. He wants so desperately to reconnect with Helen and she is not letting him do it in the way that he wants, which builds his frustration to the point of wanting to make her feel guilty and ultimately exploding at her after being questioned on what he really wants with “*I’M FIGURING IT OUT!*” (Carpenter 2.14.32). I felt really good about this progression in cold-reading the scene.

In reading Scene Fifteen again, Amy asked for an adjustment in the beginning lines where Walter offers to Helen, “You could move in with your other family,” (Carpenter 2.15.19) using the joke she has repeated throughout the play. I had tried the action of making her feel guilty and Amy said that it sounded too much like I was taking my anger out on her. This was exactly what I did. I had not actually thought of wanting a positive action in that moment and not succeeding with it, but I tried that instead and the moment felt richer for it.

We also got to read part of Scene Three where Philippe Petit appears to Walter for the first time. Liam Selvey was the only actor reading for Petit tonight, and I think he is perfect. He is a lot of fun to read with, especially in this scene. Walter is looking for inspiration, something to keep him from giving up and he needs it from his hero. Liam's smile and laugh are so charming; it is a lot of fun to work for his approval and admiration.

August 27, 2011 – Tonight at dinner, I got the email announcing the cast list for *Up*. I have been cast as Walter and could not be more excited! I was actually anticipating having another round of callbacks tomorrow, so it is exciting that we already know. We do have a lot of work to do in a short period of time, opening in just under five weeks, but we have got a stellar cast so I feel great. First rehearsal is tomorrow night...

B. Table Work & Initial Analysis

August 28, 2011 – Tonight, we had our first read-through of the play, Amy shared some thoughts about her concept, and we started to talk analysis. What was evident from the read and what Amy insists upon is that the Griffins are all deeply invested in one another. The audience must want this family to succeed and stay whole. We talked about some of the major themes of the play. First and foremost is the value of pursuing your dreams. Walter has dreamed about flying since he was a child. His life's work is centered on going "up." This is why the play is titled *Up*, because that is where Walter constantly wants to be. Amy asked us to consider as we continue what "up" meant for each of us (as characters) and if it changes. For now, I believe that "up" for Walter truly is that place in the sky. He went there once, that is where he goes in his dreams, and he wants desperately to return to that place. I believe this is definitely in the neighborhood of Walter's super-objective.

The other theme we talked about was the difference between being an adult and being a child. What does it mean to be a child and what does it mean to be a parent? In questioning who is taking care of this family, the lines between child and parent are a little blurred. Is it childish to pursue a dream while forsaking adult responsibilities? For me, there is something about Walter that is a little bit like Peter Pan. Even though Helen says that Walter always wanted a family, there is something about his disdain for a “job” and his wonder and adoration for Petit that feels really child-like.

Amy talked to us a little bit about San Pedro, California, the setting for the play. San Pedro is primarily a working-class community within Los Angeles. Major employers include the Port of Los Angeles. A blue-collar community surrounds the Griffins and Helen works for the post office; only Walter is resistant to employment. So they are essentially a one-income household since Walter’s speaking engagements are so sporadic. Walter must see that the community around him is so focused on working for a living, but he sees it purely as pursuit of money, not survival. How then does he view his wife’s job?

Amy also gave us some thoughts about character names. The name “Walter” is obviously a nod to Larry Walters, whom this fictional story is based upon. In the early 1980’s, a truck driver named Larry Walters lifted off from his backyard in San Pedro, California in an invention dubbed ‘*Inspiration I*’ – a lawn chair attached to helium balloons. He ascended to an elevation of 16,000 feet and used a pellet gun to shoot out the balloons to return to earth. This is an item for further research. Amy pointed out that the family name, Griffin, was an interesting choice on Carpenter’s part. Griffins are a mythological creature with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle. They are also known to be guardians of precious treasure. In this way, we see Walter’s divisive values in his own name – Walter is the dreamer, the flyer, and

Griffin is the protector of his family, his treasure. But even the griffin is symbolically divided between two creatures. This struggle within Walter is a key element of the character.

Amy asked us each to create a timeline for our character and we discussed the major events of the play so we could begin to think about how our character relates to each event. The Initial Event of the play is the last event in the timeline before the play begins that all the characters are living with when the curtain rises (or before their first entrance). In *Up*, our Initial Event is waking up on the first day of Mikey's sophomore year of high school, September 5. On this day, I know that Walter is excited to finish the prototype of the "paramotor." He knows that Mikey is not excited to go back to school but wants him be happy, and he is waiting to hear back from Bill at SoCal Aviation about a guest speaking opportunity which he needs to book to make Helen happy.

The Central Event of the play happens in Scene Fifteen when Walter decides to use the parasail to go up, knowing he is taking his life. Amy said we will probably have to feel it out in rehearsal, but she believes the event happens in the exchange between Walter and Petit:

"PETIT. You can do it. You need to do it. You're ready!

WALTER. I'm ready." (Carpenter 2.15.54-55)

The moment of Walter saying, "I'm ready" to his actual jump constitutes the play's Central Event. It is here that the audience understands that Walter's pain is too great and he chooses going up over staying with his family. For right now, I believe that this event takes away all of Walter's pain. His going up here is the greatest he has felt since the last time he went up. Coincidentally, the last time he went up is part of our Main Event.

Carpenter purposefully ends the play with Walter's launch sixteen years prior to the start of the play. The Main Event of the play happens after Walter has launched and Helen has

contacted him with the radio. Walter says, “I dreamed about it up here but I had no idea it would be this beautiful. If I didn’t ever have to come down, I wouldn’t!” (Carpenter 2.16.36). This is when we understand that Walter truly made the choice of “up” over his family on this day, fifteen years before the drama that just unfolded. He says if it were up to him, he would never come down. He could have said, “have to come down” with the knowledge that it just was not physically possible for him to stay up there forever, but it carries the double meaning that his wife and future child are forcing him to return to the ground. So this is our Main Event, Walter unknowingly announcing his final choice to leave his family behind as Helen lovingly continues to get him to look down at her. For Walter, this moment is one of unparalleled joy and fulfillment.

We did not actually discuss the Inciting Event of the play. This one is tricky, but for now I believe that the Inciting Event is when Walter is denied the lecture gig at SoCal Aviation in Scene Three. Amy asked me whether or not I thought Walter had seen Petit before the start of the play. I told her yes, my reason being that the stage directions in Scene Three suggest that when Walter talks to himself it is easy, “as though he’s talking to a friend” (Carpenter 1.3.1). My thought here was that Petit is the “friend” that Walter occasionally talks to. Amy encouraged me to consider just how close Walter is to giving up that day and that Petit’s appearance is actually the inspirational intervention that Walter is in desperate need of that day. Dramatically, it is stronger to make this the first time he has seen his hero and Amy’s suggestion really increases the stakes for that scene and the whole beginning of the play. If we consider this moment of Petit’s appearance as that important, the event that causes it should be the Inciting Event (at least for Walter).

Amy was also very pointed about saying, “Walter is not crazy.” I believe she said this to keep me from “playing crazy.” Walter absolutely does not believe he is crazy. He is used to people accusing him of being crazy for his inventions and dreams, but he knows that what he is doing is worthwhile. It is not crazy; he has to do it. He follows this same mentality as he feels inspired by Petit or incensed by the thought of money and takes action to eliminate the threat (i.e. burning money and eating money). These are deliberate actions, not just “crazy behavior.”

Amy suggested a few things to research this week: the documentary *Man On Wire* about Petit and the World Trade Center walk, paragliders, flying suits (looking at the mentality of people that enjoy this kind of flying), and looking for the Willy Loman in Walter. She also let us know that we will be utilizing a condensed version of the Whelan Recording Technique for rehearsals. The Whelan Recording Technique is a rehearsal process created by Jeremy Whelan that allows actors to start exploring scene objectives and character impulses in beginning rehearsals without holding a script or worrying about lines. This is achieved by creating an audio recording of the actors reading the scene and then physically playing the scene while listening to the audio playback. I have not used the Whelan Recording Technique in some time, but I enjoy the process. I find it really liberating to be able to work on actions and relationships on stage so early without having to look down at my script every other second.

C. *The Rehearsal Process*

August 29, 2011 – Tonight we started rehearsing Scenes One, Two, and Three. Walter appears in Scenes One and Three. Working with the Whelan Recording Technique is already very helpful. Starting with Scene One, we read the scene once without recording audio to warm up, make sure we understood the given circumstances and knew where the major beat shifts

were. Then we could record focusing on objectives and actions in the dialogue. After we record any scene, Amy either talks to us about something in the reading that she thinks needs adjusting and we re-record or we go to rehearse the scene with the audio playback. For this we are onstage, with as many rehearsal props as possible and the only rules are: watch, listen to and respond to everything that happens, never deny an impulse, and do not mouth your lines. We are allowed to make sounds if the impulse arises, but not text. We are allowed to do anything with our mouths that might not actually happen when we are speaking (for example, we are allowed to take a drink while the character is speaking if the impulse is there). We do not have to (and should not) indicate that we are talking. This part of the Whelan Recording Technique process will be referred to hereinafter as “living the scene.” After we live the scene the first time, we talk about possible adjustments, places where we need to leave more silence to achieve necessary physical business or blocking, and Amy starts to make blocking suggestions. Then we do the process over again. It is surprising how quickly this technique gives us rough blocking that might actually be kept.

Before the rehearsal, I came in with some preliminary ideas for Walter in Scene One that I wanted to test. First, what does he value? He is totally excited about his motorized paraglider prototype. He insists on getting Helen and Mikey involved in testing it out – to Helen, “If we were outside, you’d take a few running steps, jump, and you’d go right up in the air!” (Carpenter 1.1.14) and to Mikey, “You want to try it on real quick?” (Carpenter 1.1.74). Throughout the scene, Carpenter gives Walter an abundance of exclamation marks. In Scene Three, he tells Petit, “I am, I am [still dreaming]. I keep – searching for the next thing, you know” (Carpenter 1.3.16). Walter is passionate about finding a new way up and this paramotor is it!

So, the initial objective I had for Walter in Scene One was to finish the prototype, which serves the super-objective: get back “up.” As we worked the scene, Amy pointed out that I, as Walter, need to sell the dream to Helen and Mikey. This makes a much better objective, because it actually has its test in my scene partners – the objective can only be achieved by playing action on them. I was already playing mostly positive actions on Helen and Mikey, but this new objective made them more specific. I need to try to keep this up and see if it is useful in the other scenes.

For Scene Three, I wanted to test and clarify Walter’s objectives for four different partners. First, with Bill on the phone, Walter wants Bill to give him the job speaking at the SoCal Aviation club dinner. Walter gets denied – that is Walter’s Inciting Event. After the phone call, Walter wants to pick himself up and get himself out of the disappointment he is feeling. He cannot do it himself, but Petit miraculously appears. Walter then wants Petit to give him the inspiration he needs to get back up. When Helen comes in, Walter wants her to get behind him on looking for a new idea.

Both in the recording and in living the scene, I felt good about these objectives. Helen’s asthma attack is a big event. It feels like it changes the objective to see her in such distress. I think the objective becomes earning her favor again. Walter cannot complete his last gentle defense of the dream – “Somehow I haven’t been able to find something, an idea, that matched up with the ideas I have in my-...” (Carpenter 1.3.51). He needs her to believe in him. This might be a better objective. He flat out says, “I want you to trust me” (Carpenter 1.3.51). He is willing to do anything in this moment to get her to believe in him again, even promise to find a job, something he hates the thought of doing.

This first scene with Petit poses an interesting challenge. In the living of the scene today, I turned my head stage left to see Petit as he appears on the wire, but it would have been stupid to play that scene entirely upstage as he crosses. So I turned my head downstage after establishing the discovery and placed the vision of the wire high in the air above the audience. While Amy says she likes this visual, I have no way of knowing where Liam is going to be on the platform behind me when he is not talking. It is also frustrating that I cannot see exactly what he is doing on the wire to react truthfully to any little change that may happen. We will see where this goes.

August 30, 2011 – Tonight we started working on Scenes Four and Six with the Whelan Recording Technique, and I am continuing to test scene objectives. I think we are skipping Scene Five because we have specific prop and scenic needs in that scene and cannot effectively rehearse it.

Walter's objective for Scene Four is tough to pinpoint. I think this is another instance where the objective changes halfway through the scene, though Walter's scene partners do not change this time. Once Walter comes back upstairs with "the chair," it feels clear that his objective is to inspire Maria and get her to buy the dream, and have her, Mikey, and especially Helen look at Walter as a hero again for what he has accomplished in the pursuit of the dream. Deciding on an objective before going down to basement is the tough part. The catalyst moment for this scene, what all the characters are living with, is watching a pregnant teenage girl devouring her dinner. There is nothing to suggest that Mikey has ever brought a friend to the house, and the first one is a pregnant girl. Walter is really surprised, but he is not freaked out like Helen is. Either way, everyone is avoiding talking about it. So this afternoon, Walter has gone from one tense situation with Helen to another tense situation with his whole family. My hunch is that Walter wants to alleviate all this tension and return to happy family mode, but he

does not know how in this situation. I believe this is the intention behind the line “Oh, you’re pregnant?” (Carpenter 1.4.8). He is trying to cover the fact that they were all thinking about that awkwardness without talking about it. In the recording, the line got muffled giggles from our stage managers so hopefully I will be able to keep it funny.

The rest of Scene Four is already a lot of fun. In living the scene on stage, the cast is finding a lot of fun physical action and we are already really comfortable with the familial relationships. Both today and yesterday, I noticed that as Walter, I want to touch my wife and son a lot to express my affection for them and make them feel loved. With Mikey, I know that he has a difficult time making friends and has some self-confidence issues so I like to make him feel tough and manly by giving him a lot of forceful back and shoulder slaps. I want him to feel like his Dad is his best buddy and he is always there for him. With Helen, the touches are softer but often very playful. Working on Scene One yesterday, I found a moment to tickle her under the ribs to get her to lighten up. Today in Scene Four, I felt drawn to her for the part of the story about the day before our wedding, and wanted to connect with her physically there. The actress playing Helen, Shannon Webber, is really good at picking up on these physical moments and embracing them. She surprised me today with the line “My real husband always takes care of dessert” (Carpenter 1.4.156) turning our private joke, usually meant to shame me into action, into a suggestive incentive by gently leaning into me. Without talking about it, we seem to be laying in the idea that Walter and Helen still enjoy a physically intimate relationship, despite the tension of their financial situation.

For the next time we rehearse Scene Four, I need to go back and drop in the memory of the flight and everything that Walter saw. What is the sound of the sky?

Scene Six, even with the Whelan Recording Technique, is a little tricky. Scene Six is split between the Griffins' kitchen and Maria's living room, so after recording it, we had to be careful in the living of the scene to only source the dialogue going on in our own room.

In the moment before this scene, Walter has just returned from driving through the Los Padres National Forest and has decided to withdraw money from Helen's pension to facilitate his lie about getting a job. He has been thinking about it for hours, coming up with the details, debating whether or not he should lie. Ultimately, he wants her to feel happy and not worry about their situation so he can feel free to continue to look for the next invention. So his objective is to get her to buy this lie and be happy. So far, this objective works.

We have come up with some really great initial staging for the end of the scene. Amy talked about wanting to leave the audience worried at the end of the act, and obviously no one should know yet that Walter is lying about the job. So as all the other characters are living in this place of newfound happiness, Amy asked me to walk downstage center as I watch Petit walk the wire and allow Walter's inner life to surface so the audience can see more of what is really going on with him. This transition is a lot fun, but I am not yet specific enough with what his inner life truly is at that moment. Tonight I focused on the guilt of lying, and I am not totally satisfied with that choice.

August 31, 2011 – We moved into Act 2 tonight and I got to work on Scenes Eight and Nine with the Whelan Recording Technique. My goal tonight was to continue to test scene objectives and feel out what it means to burn the money and watch it fall from the sky.

I had to drop a few things in to my imagination for Scene Eight. Two and a half months have passed; it is the week of Thanksgiving. Every weekday Walter has gotten up and dressed in a suit for Helen and Mikey to believe he is going to work. He takes the car and drives around

Los Angeles. The script never says exactly what he has been doing every day, except for a few isolated activities. In Scene Twelve when Mikey asks him what he did with the money, he says, “I bought those parasails. Thought they’d be fun. I, ah. Got the car fixed” (Carpenter 2.12.53) and in Scene Fourteen he admits, “I was just buying time. So I could look for opportunities” (Carpenter 2.14.20). I will need to think a little more about what he has done with his time. The most important thing here is his growing guilt for continuing this lie for so long. But Walter has not found a way to make up the money he has used, so he has to keep up the lie.

Walter’s objective with Petit is difficult to determine, since he does not say anything to him. It seems like Walter is just taking in the inspiration that Petit is giving him. Perhaps the objective can be to glean wisdom and inspiration to continue to fight for the dream – to make sure that he is confident that Walter will not give up. Not saying anything to him in this scene suggests to me that even if this is what Walter wants, he has difficulty doing it. This exchange with Petit has to motivate Walter to burn a twenty-dollar bill – why? Petit tells Walter why he never uses a net and suggests that his life will end walking up the wire “into the clouds. And then I will be gone” (Carpenter 2.8.1). He offers no reason to look back, to have any kind of exit strategy other than “up.” I chose to think of the money as Walter’s net, so in taking Petit’s advice he must get rid of the net. Amy and I talked about this and agreed that the way Walter feels about money is that he hates its necessity and regards it as an obstacle to the pursuit of his dream.

In the living of the scene, Amy suggested that the money burning moment happen downstage center. Laying in this negative value for money inspired me to really enjoy watching the bill burn, blow on it gently to fuel the flame, drop it to the floor and stomp it out with one triumphant step. Of course, the flame is imaginary for now. I am not sure when we will actually

start using fire - probably not until technical rehearsals. Still, this already feels like a powerful moment that will really catch the audience by surprise.

When Helen enters, Walter's objective is to keep her believing that everything is getting better because of this job. She has almost caught Walter burning the money and he wants to make her feel confident in him, that he is actually happy doing this. He caps it off by surprising her with the silver bracelet, which serves as testimony to her that financially they are doing the best they have done in a long time.

For the moment after Helen leaves, Amy has said that she wants to use projections on the set to show a lot of money raining down rather than a single bill falling from the sky. In this moment, Amy wants me as Walter to take in the event as a vision of impending doom and find a way to prepare myself. With a little side coaching during the first living of the scene, I grounded my stance and brought my arms up a little as if starting to shield myself. In the second living, I had the impulse to shelter myself under the ironing board. I like this choice, but Amy does not seem totally satisfied with it.

For Scene Nine, I started with the objective of bonding with Mikey over cleaning the chair. After talking about it, Amy reminded me that this is an opportunity for Walter to sell Mikey on the dream. With that objective, the scene feels pretty easy. I think that Walter is pretty good at hiding the anxiety he is feeling from Mikey, and loves spending time with him, especially since neither of them have spent much time together in the past couple of months: Mikey spends all his free time with Maria and/or working and Walter has been out putting up the illusion of having a job. Cleaning the chair really must be a secondary task to working on his relationship with Mikey. So clearly, the triggers of this scene are that Mikey keeps asking about work and making money, and he is not getting the message that the enjoyment of working for

yourself is a far greater reward than money. There is a key line in this scene that sheds light on Walter's values, that when he was younger, the mindset of his peers was, "buy a shiny car, and then spend all your time and money making it shinier. I didn't care about that – about being a slave to the dollar" (Carpenter 2.9.19). He considers that kind of mindset a self-imposed slavery and he rejects the notion of living in bondage to the pursuit of money.

September 1, 2011 – Tonight we continued work with the Whelan Recording Technique and got to Scenes Twelve and Fourteen. I continued to test objectives and feel out the major events in these scenes. Since these scenes mark the play's emotional acceleration towards the climax, I also wanted to start working on these scenes with ease, especially in my voice.

In Scene Twelve, Walter is not expecting to be caught when he enters, but as soon as he realizes that Helen is upset, I think his objective is to convince her and Mikey that nothing is wrong. As it becomes increasingly clear that Helen knows more than he thinks, Walter has to make them believe he can fix the situation. Amy had to remind me of needing to find positive actions to play on Helen and making sure I was fighting to inspire her trust. I think I am finding this difficult because I want to indulge a little too much in the thought that Helen is preventing me from pursuing my dream. I feel like what I have done is for everyone's benefit and it angers me that she is painting me as a bad guy, especially in front of Mikey. Even with needing to find positive actions, I think this angry inner life can come through a little more when Helen pushes me into a corner. I want to work on taking her insult, "who allows a *thing*, a *chair* to define his life instead of people" (Carpenter 2.12.43) really personally. That needs to provoke me enough to top her, insisting she does not know anything about what defines my life.

After she leaves, Walter's objective with Mikey is to make sure he is on Walter's side. I felt good about this part of the scene during callbacks and I still do. The main obstacle to this

objective is Walter's own guilt and how difficult it is to admit to Mikey that he lied to Helen and spent all the money they had. Mason Azbill, the actor playing Mikey, brings a lot of vulnerable fear to this scene. In living the scene, I was able to take in the disappointment and terror in Mason's eyes, as well as his voice, making my actions even more difficult.

We tried a couple of different staging ideas for the end of Scene Twelve. The stage directions indicate that right before Mikey leaves, Walter begins to tear a twenty-dollar bill into pieces. After Mikey leaves, Walter eats a torn piece of the bill, then opens his briefcase and puts the remaining pieces inside with a whole mess of other previously torn money (Carpenter 2.12.58). Before living this scene, the only thing Amy and I had agreed upon about this event was that everything Walter does to destroy the money is deliberate, not absent minded as the script sometimes suggests. So in living the scene, I followed the stage directions as written, but with the intent of destroying this bill that was now costing me my family as well as my dream. Amy was not satisfied with this at first. The main thing she felt needed to change was what Mikey saw. It does not feel true to her that Mikey would watch Walter start to tear a twenty-dollar bill in half and not say anything, just run out. I think I agree with this choice. First, I would think Mikey would try to stop it in his realization that they need the money, and second, after this event and the events of Scene Thirteen, Mikey is angry at Walter for his irresponsibility and failings as a father, not for being crazy (only Helen accuses him of this). So we agreed that Walter does not do anything until Mikey has run out. In living the scene again, Amy let me feel out different possibilities with a little side coaching. What we have set on for now is taking my time to get to the table, taking out the bill, considering it, opening my briefcase (towards the audience), aggressively tearing the bill into pieces, eating some of them and dropping the rest into the case. At this point, I like to look at the case and consider everything I have done before

slamming the case shut in disgust. While chewing on paper is a little gross, the action of consuming my enemy is really provoking me. And I am told we are going to have edible money eventually, so that will be okay.

I think Walter's objective at the top of Scene Fourteen is to make Helen believe in him again. I love the language Walter uses to make Helen feel the need to stay together: "Because this is his home. This is what we have. This family. This house. This backyard. A place to come back to" (Carpenter 2.14.8). I love the simplicity of this language because my own connection to the idea of "home" is very important to me. I imagine my own family home where I grew up and where my parents still live. After I moved out of the house for college, whenever I was home I noticed myself really taking in the details of the physical house. I feel very connected to that house as the shelter for my family and our shared memories and that is the kind of value Walter has and wants to provoke in Helen. Just like I found in the callbacks, Helen's resistance to this action pushes Walter to the point of forsaking his objective and letting the anger escape to get her to back off.

When Mikey enters, I am not really sure what Walter's objective is. After Mikey's entrance, Walter is silent for a long time, taking in what is happening. My feeling is that he is living with the guilt of having blown up at Helen and knowing that Mikey saw it. So it is possible the objective could be to make it right and win them back, and not being sure how to do that causes the silence. Mikey's line "I don't know, Mom, why don't we ask Dad? What am I talking about?" (Carpenter 2.14.50) finally challenges Walter to act on that objective. But as soon as he does, Mikey begins to shut Walter down and there is another period of time where Walter is without text, taking in Mikey's meltdown. This part feels a little inactive but for now what is living is constantly taking in what Mikey is saying and looking for a way to fix the

problem. Not knowing what to do is frustrating, but I think letting that frustration live and build will serve the scene well.

The most important event of this scene for me is the moment where Mikey accuses Walter of caring more about the chair than about him and urges Walter to hit him. I want to make this moment very clear in the line “No, Mikey” (Carpenter 2.14.66). In the living of it tonight, I saw that Mikey felt completely unloved and I want to make him feel like sacred treasure in that moment before the danger of the fire interrupts.

September 2, 2011 – Tonight we got to finish the rest of the play with the Whelan Recording Technique. We worked Scene Fourteen again to solidify blocking choices, and then we got to rehearse Scene Five for the first time. In Scene Five, Walter is paying bills in the basement and then sees Petit walking the wire. The script suggests that Walter suddenly attacks the paramotor or some other project and causes a large crash and a mess. He then begins to clean up “quietly, as if someone else had made the mess” (Carpenter 1.5.2) before Helen calls down to him and he tells her not to come down. This scene is tricky because something between paying the bills and Petit’s appearance causes a violent outburst in Walter, which is not something we have seen from him.

My goal was to approach this scene like a Meisner exercise. Walter has a task that he feels very strongly about: paying the bills. He has a strong reason for doing it, because Helen will be mad if the bills are not paid and a utility gets shut off. At the same time, the way he feels about money is such that the task disgusts him. At the top of the scene, loving Helen and needing her to be happy overcomes the distaste for the task. Petit’s appearance is essentially the knock at the door and hinders the task because he also feels strongly about seeing Petit. Walter wants his gracefulness, his inspiration, and his strength. Repeating what he said about his wire

walk earlier, Petit says, “Everyone on Wall Street stopped trying to make money” (Carpenter 1.5.1). I believe this line needs to trigger in Walter the need to rebel against the task and tear a dollar bill into confetti for Petit’s approval. When Petit leaves, the realization that the obstacle of money is still there needs to provoke the violent outburst. I was told that there will be a motor or some kind of heavy machine that I can attack with a hammer. In living the scene tonight, not having either item, I slammed my hand down on the table a few times. I need to work on dropping in the circumstances that are going to provoke an honest outburst, because tonight it felt like I was just playing the emotion and not the action.

For Scene Fifteen, I came in without any real ideas for an objective. At the top of the scene, Walter is living with the shock and horror of having his house burned down and the guilt of being responsible for everything. It feels like Walter wants forgiveness, but starting out, I was not really sure how to make that gel with the outburst he has towards Mikey. This is another spot where I am worried about playing the emotion and not an action. After living it the first time and trying to establish the blocking for grabbing Mikey, Amy gave me a note about desperately needing to change the ugliness in Mikey in that moment. If Walter is trying to get them to forgive him, this is a necessity in that moment. Mikey has hardened himself to apologies saying, “Don’t be sorry, sorry’s stupid... Sorry’s for suckers” (Carpenter 2.15.23-25) and Walter needs him to not be cynical and unloving. The emotional strain of the situation causes a poor choice of action in that moment that results in Walter hurting Mikey and becoming an even worse father than he has already been, which he immediately recognizes and needs to change by hugging Mikey. I am anxious to pursue this objective a little harder next time to see what happens, especially since the way Shannon played Helen’s exit in the living of the scene tonight hit me as though Walter had achieved her forgiveness. I am interested in what happens if

achieving that objective is not enough for Walter, in order to necessitate what happens next with Petit.

My initial idea for the end of Scene Fifteen is that Walter wants everything to rewind, he wants all of the pain taken away but does not know how to do it. Petit appears and his objective becomes to get Petit to save him, to show him the way. Petit directs him to the parasail and the only way out of the pain is to go “up.” His objective becomes going up one last time knowing full well it will cost him his life. Amy told us about how she envisioned the final moment of the scene with Walter running downstage center to jump at the edge of the apron. At first, I was not really sure how to approach the blocking without jumping and landing on the edge of the stage (sort of anti-climactic) or actually jumping into the audience (totally ridiculous). I decided to treat it like a Superman flying take off, imagining my body lifting off the ground, without actually jumping, just as I reach the end of the stage. I wanted to do this lifting one leg behind me, but after trying it a couple times, it is clear that I will not have the balance to hold that pose gracefully for the length of time necessary while the projection of the expanding parasail plays behind me. We do not know exactly how long it will take yet, but Amy wants the moment to last a while.

Walter’s objective for Scene Sixteen feels strange, because he wants to get the chair up in the air, but that objective cannot be achieved by playing action on Helen or Helen’s mother. In reading and living the scene, I felt an enormous amount of anticipation and excitement leading up to lift off. The launch moment was pure joy. Until we have the rigging, I am just going to run offstage with the chair as fast as I can, imagining the ascent. I could try the objective of getting Helen to help Walter launch or to totally support the launch. Ultimately the goal is to go up whether she likes it or not.

I think Walter's value for Helen's mother is not particularly strong. He only says one line to her, "I said she could come if she wanted" (Carpenter 2.16.7) which in the living of the scene felt like it was more for Helen's benefit anyway. I wanted to look at Helen the whole time the line was being said; I was much more interested in her reaction. The only other reaction to Helen's mother is blowing her a kiss after she calls Walter crazy (Carpenter 2.16.20). I feel like Walter knows she does not like him and does not care because he has Helen.

After the launch happens, the objective needs to change, but again it is hard to determine one because it feels like the event of flying is overwhelming any sense of objective. The essential action over the radio is sharing with Helen how life changing the experience of going "up" is. It does not feel like he wants anything from her in that moment, except maybe to share in his joy. For our Main Event to land, I do not think that the gravity of what Walter says – "If I didn't ever have to come down, I wouldn't!" (Carpenter 2.16.36) – can hit him. If anything, he wants to be able to pull Helen up to where he is in that moment.

September 5, 2011 – Tonight we are going back to the beginning of the play and repeating the Whelan Recording Technique work for the first four scenes of the play. I used our weekend off to look at some research material that Amy had recommended, including the *New Yorker* article about Larry Walters and the documentary film on Philippe Petit, *Man On Wire*. I am eager to see how this research can be applied this week. My other goal this week, in the continuation of the Whelan Recording Technique work, is to really develop Walter's relationships to the other characters on stage, especially Helen, Mikey, and Petit.

Before starting Scene One, Amy talked to us a little bit and we agreed on some specific circumstances. We agreed that the scene starts right around 7 a.m. Amy asked me what time Walter got up this morning. I decided that Walter got up at 4:30 a.m. in order to work on the

prototype and he has already had five cups of coffee. The moment before the scene begins, he has begged Helen to sit in the chair so he can secure where the straps attach – he has not told her that he plans on turning it on with her in it. The prototype is so close to being done, if he can finish today, he can start gathering the materials for the real thing, and have something new to show off when he speaks at the SoCal Aviation dinner.

After living the scene with the recording a couple of times and getting a strong sense of our blocking and how the scene should go, Amy had us improvise the scene without the recording. It felt good to be able to do this with a lot of freedom, not really worrying about the specifics of the text, although we knew a lot more of the lines than we realized. The progression of the scene felt good. I am having a lot of fun working on the chair and teasing Helen when she teases me about her “real” family. I am building up Walter’s dislike of Helen’s urging him to go back to school and pick another job path (circling help wanted ads). In Scene Fifteen, Walter says, “I always felt like I was good at making things. I never took any engineering classes, but I could always look at something and figure out how to make it work” (Carpenter 2.15.51). He is proud of this gift and the fact that he did not need to be taught how to do it. Besides, school would just be another place where he would have to listen to someone else tell him what to do. I love the blocking we came up with for the moment of rejecting the suggestion of going back to school. I pick up the chair off the table and take it downstage left; it feels like a minor temper-tantrum.

After Mikey enters, it is a lot of fun exploring the close, best-friend type of relationship Walter has with his son. Tonight, I worked on building up Walter’s love for Philippe Petit, based on what I watched in *Man On Wire*. It is not hard to see what Walter finds so captivating about Petit. I love his story about how his dream of walking between the Twin Towers started. He

was in a dentist's waiting room and found a newspaper article on the towers. He wanted this article, so he tore it out, covering the sound with a sneeze. Petit says, "Now of course I would have a toothache for a week, but what's the pain in comparison that now I have acquired my dream" (qtd. in *Man on Wire*). This might be an idea to play with for Walter, that the pursuit of the dream is worth pain. Petit immediately goes on to add, "Usually when you have a dream, the object of your dream is tangible. It's there. It's quixotic but it's there, nagging you, you know, confronting you" (qtd. in *Man on Wire*). There is something there that resonates with Walter. The difficulty of finding a new opportunity to go "up" is nagging him, because it used to be tangible. The old lawn chair remains tangible.

Even at the age he is in this documentary, Petit is such an impassioned dream-machine. He defies authority to achieve seemingly impossible feats that are breathtaking to witness. I think Petit's independence and grace are what Walter admires most. So I want Walter to work on instilling a value for those qualities in Mikey, just as he desires them for himself.

Something I read in the *New Yorker* article "The Man In the Flying Lawn Chair" by George Plimpton has really confirmed an impulse I am having about Walter's mindset and physicality. First, I noticed when I read the article that Bridget Carpenter crafted a good bit of Walter Griffin's dialogue and history based on Plimpton's interview with Larry Walters – almost verbatim in places. One of the things that stuck out to me though was the slight difference in the original inspiration for flying. For Walter, the story he gives Petit in Scene 3 is simple, but not very detailed: "When I was a little kid, I went to the fair, and I saw a lady holding a huge bunch of balloons. I thought, man, those would take you up" (Carpenter 1.3.6). While I always enjoyed that thought, Larry Walter's version makes for an even better visual:

“I was always fascinated by balloons... When I was about eight or nine, I was taken to Disneyland. The first thing when we walked in, there was a lady holding what seemed like a zillion Mickey Mouse balloons, and I went, ‘Wow!’ I know that’s when the idea developed. I mean, you get enough of those and they’re going to lift you up.” (qtd. in Plimpton 62-64)

I love this image. I dropped it in for the aforementioned line in rehearsal tonight, and it is fun to play with and paint for Petit. Having this dream of flying rooted in Walter since childhood is a really powerful thing for me to act upon. That thought combined with several other little hints throughout the script makes me want to move on-stage with a lot of child-like playfulness, especially when talking about flying. Specifically in Scene One, I started doing a running jump to illustrate the goal of the paramotor to Helen, and for Mikey I demonstrated the paramotor like a little kid playing pretend, trying to get him excited about it. I especially like this choice in that moment, because it makes me even more vulnerable to the news that the motorized paraglider has already been invented.

I had fun tonight working on how this new thought about Walter’s child-like sensibilities affects his physicality in telling the story about the chair. With the objective of wanting to get everyone happy and inspired again, the physical tactics start in the joy of sharing and recreating the stories about Mikey’s early childhood. In the living of the scene, I was able to imagine a two-year-old Mikey sitting, pouting at the top of the steps, unwilling to walk down. I also imagined the first day he spoke. Walter was in the kitchen making lunch, and Mikey walked up to him and pulled on his pant leg. Walter asked him if he wanted some lunch and he nodded his head. Walter asked him what he wanted (half rhetorically, not expecting much), and Mikey looked at Helen for a second, scrunched up his face, then looked back at Walter and said,

chopped but deliberate, “I think I’d like a tomato sandwich” (Carpenter 1.4.24). Helen and Walter were stunned speechless for a moment, staring at each other before erupting in laughter and hugging Mikey.

I also tried to drop in the memory of *Peter and the Wolf*. This was really easy for me to connect to because I had the book and audiotope as a kid and, like Mikey, would listen to it and follow along in the book over and over and over again. My parents have told me that when they used to read to me at night, they would try to skip pages in order to get done faster, but since I had memorized the sound of the story, I would not let them. I thought about this in creating the memory of Helen asking Walter whether it was right to hide the record and hope that Mikey would forget about it, and when he did not, tell him that it was lost. I decided that Walter was sick of the song too and supported her decision. In the scene, this is the first time it has come up since he was a little kid and they never told him the truth, so the surprise that he still believes the lie at fifteen-years old is too funny. This whole section feels like a child’s game, and it is so much fun.

I realized tonight in the living of the scene that I was having a harder time imagining the history of the flight than I was the memory of Mikey’s childhood. When that section came up, I tried to focus on taking in all the imagery I (as Walter) was giving to Maria as it was being spoken and exploring how I could illustrate it with my body. The initial impulse I had was to bring the chair down stage center and open up the story to the whole audience, use the air above them for all of my image work, and recreate (or relive) the experience that way. I found a fun moment in illustrating the wind gust that pushed the chair and caused me to drop the air pistol. After the moment was over, I wanted to crouch behind the chair, peaking over the top corner of it, assessing the situation. I think I will have to find something that does not hide me so much.

September 6, 2011 – Tonight, Amy wanted to go back and rework the first four scenes of the play with the Whelan Recording Technique. She asked us to start to consider the continuity of these scenes since they all occur in the same day by working through for ourselves what was happening during the day that is not seen on stage. Here is what I worked on in my imagination based on my timeline and things I noticed during the living of the scenes – the progression of major events that day for Walter. I have written these thoughts from Walter’s perspective:

- I wake up at 4:30 a.m., get straight to work on the prototype in the kitchen.
- Helen comes downstairs at 6:50 and I beg her to help me.
- Scene 1
 - I test the prototype with Helen in it. The fan turns on, but I cannot get Helen excited about it. She is too concerned with being late.
 - Helen hints that I should look for a job, asks about the SoCal Aviation speech, suggests that I go back to school – this offends me
 - Helen expresses interest in a real estate course that we cannot afford because I am not earning anything to allow her to do it
 - We part on good but frustrated terms
 - Mikey comes down and I try to get him excited about his first day of school.
 - Mikey expresses interest in working, I insist he not tie himself down – I use the story in the paper about Petit to inspire him.
 - Mikey inadvertently calls me a has-been (“I want to be good at something, like you were” (Carpenter 1.1.71)) – this stays with me.

- I try to excite him with the possibility of helping with the prototype, and he tells me the motorized paraglider has already been invented. – This crushes me, and I try to hide it from him.
- Mikey reassures me that he likes my inventions and leaves.
- I spend the day sketching and pouring over the paramotor plans to find some way into a new opportunity. I am also waiting for Bill to call. I keep thinking about the possibility that I am no longer good at inventing flying machines. This lasts for eight hours.
- Around 3:30, I know that Helen will be coming home any minute, but Bill has not called. I want to be able to tell her that I have the speaking job. I decide to call him.
- Scene 3
 - I talk to Bill and sell myself for the dinner speech – he tells me they do not have speakers back twice. I ask if he will talk to other chapters about me and he gives me an excuse, saying he is about to fly out of town for a week but he might be able to call them when he gets back. He rushes me off the phone.
 - I hit a new low. I have no prospects, no opportunities, my wife is not happy and my son thinks I am washed up. I have no inspiration, and all I want is to feel the way I did when I was “up.”
 - I see Philippe Petit walking a wire in the sky above me. He talks to me! He tells me “A bird doesn’t use a leash” (Carpenter 1.3.5). Nothing ties a bird to the ground. He reminds me of how I started dreaming about flying in the first place.
 - I confess how hard it is to turn inspiration into financial gain. He tells me “A bird does not carry a wallet” (Carpenter 1.3.19) and disappears. A bird has no need for money, all a bird knows how to do is fly. And I am a bird.

- I feel revitalized with new ideas to try just as Helen comes home. She asks about the paramotor and I tell her I am changing directions to find something new. The lack of progress bothers her.
- She tells me her hours are going to be cut, and she pressures me to get a job. We argue, and she starts to have an asthma attack.
- I go to get her inhaler and want her to feel better, but she rejects my comfort. I promise her I will get a job this week. She gives me the silent treatment, and I go upstairs to get her medication.
- I fume to myself in our bathroom after finding her pills. When I come back down, I run into Mikey. I ask him how the first day was, and he tells me he has got a friend coming over for dinner and Helen wants me to go to the store – this is a huge surprise.
- I give Helen her pills. She is in a frenzy trying to get things ready, but she gives me the grocery list coldly. I go to the store, get the items she needs and come home. I give her the stuff, and she still will not talk to me.
- I go back to trying to sketch ideas, but I am blocked again, thinking about the argument.
- Mikey’s friend, Maria, arrives. She is visibly pregnant... Mikey did not say anything and no one is talking about it. The four of us sit down to eat. Maria eats voraciously.
- Scene 4
 - I eat silently and try to figure out what to say in this situation. Maria and Helen talk awkwardly. Maria finally mentions her pregnancy and I try to cover as if we did not notice. Maria’s home life sounds a little rough...
 - Maria asks about Mikey as a little kid, and Helen starts to share his “scootching” habit (Carpenter 1.4.17). I see an opportunity to lighten up the mood and get back

on good terms with Helen, so I join in on the stories. I tell Maria that she will be going through similar things soon enough, and somehow the conversation gets heavy again because Helen wants to question her about her age and whether or not she will keep the baby. Maria is surprisingly upbeat and optimistic about the situation.

- Maria asks Helen about her job. I can hear the contempt in Helen's voice oozing all over the place and it makes me sick. I feel guilty. Maria asks me what I do, and I tell about my lecture circuit, that I am an entrepreneur. Mikey starts to gush about my inventions and how I was on Letterman. It is really exciting that he is so proud of me, but I try to look humble. The fact that Maria really does want to see the chair, is super exciting.
- I show Maria down to the basement where I keep the chair displayed. She looks around at all the other little projects that are strewn about my work area. She asks how I was able to make a lawn chair fly. I ask if she really wants to hear the story and she says, "Totally." I want the opportunity to tell the story with Helen and Mikey present, so I tell her to go back upstairs, I will be there in a second. She leaves and I dust off the chair a bit before taking it upstairs.
- Scene 4 continued
 - I bring the chair in and try to get Helen excited about the story. I give Maria the background information about my dream of flight and how I shared it with Helen on our first date. I use this prologue as much to try to remind Helen of how good our love is, and how important it is to the story, as I do to entertain and inform Maria. I can tell she is starting to warm to me again.

- I talk about how I literally dreamed about flying and how it got me through Vietnam.
- I get to the part about our wedding day and use this story to physically reconnect with Helen and see if we are okay again. She silently returns my look and touch.
- Feeling better about that, I continue with the story of my lawn chair dream and how I made it fly. Through the story, I get to relive my glory day and have Helen and Mikey share in the legend. I want to remind them that this kind of story is worth continuing to pursue.
- Mikey brings in the tape of my conversation with the air traffic controller. It is so great to hear it again and see how much Mikey and Helen enjoy it.
- Maria accidentally puts a damper on my story by asking if it is in the Guinness Book of World Records. I really wished it had been recognized as a record, but I was disqualified on a technicality.
- Helen suggests I go for dessert, so Mikey and I go. The day ends on a high note for me.

I found this work very helpful for making these first few scenes feel connected, and really solidifying the start of Walter's journey. What is key is that this day does represent the lowest he has ever felt in his life, really to the point of considering giving up the dream, but Petit rescues him. Helen's resistance to that dream in the belief that the family needs money becomes Walter's chief obstacle. At no point does Walter hate her for it, though. He really wants a way to make them both happy.

September 7, 2011 – We continued the second round of the Whelan Recording Technique tonight for Scenes Five and Six. We were scheduled to do Eight as well, but we ran out of time. We will get to Eight on Sunday, probably.

My goal for Scene Five was to use some of the values and thoughts I found in yesterday's work in order to fuel Walter's descent into this new low. We have talked about the reason that Walter keeps seeing Petit and it appears to happen when he is at his most desperate. After the joy of retelling the story of his flight the previous day, Walter now has to deal with the problem of the family's need for money. The last time he saw Petit, he gave Walter the inspiration he needed to go on, and now he wants that from him again. In living the scene tonight, I felt torn between finishing the task and watching Petit walk the wire, and would try to go back to the bills before deciding I would rather watch Petit. Amy suggested I allow myself to be enrapt by Petit as soon as he appears, which I think makes what Walter values in that moment very clear. He wants to be "a man in the sky" (Carpenter 1.5.2) like Petit is. I enjoy tearing the check into confetti and the idea of this rebellion being mirrored in Petit's juggling. I cannot actually see it, but the image in my mind is really magical. It helped me to be in such a joyful place for when he leaves and I realize I am still on the ground – this really did start to provoke anger in me tonight. The desire to lash out at something was there.

For Scene Six, I wanted to play with how well (or poorly) Walter is living with the lie. I imagined that he had driven all the way out to the Los Padres National Forest and started to form the lie there. He had thought about it all through the hour and a half drive back home, and was nervous about getting her to believe it. In the scene, I tried actions that would make Helen feel satisfied or confident. The scene feels easy, but I am a little worried about it being too apparent that Walter is lying. When Helen is out of the room, Amy wants me turned out towards the

audience so that they can see Walter living with the circumstances out of her view. In these moments, Walter does not need to put up a front, obviously, but I cannot give away too soon that something is really wrong. I am not sure how to address this yet.

We are all nervous about attempting this scene without the recording because the true difficulty will be getting the timing of the lines correct in the overlap of the scenes. We ran out of time before we could get to the improvisation step.

September 8, 2011 – Tonight was a light rehearsal for me. I was only called to do the second round of the Whelan Recording Technique for Scene Nine. We continued to fine-tune the rough blocking we had come up with last week. My goal was to focus on finding the specific actions I could play on Mikey in this scene. In the opening, I felt like I wanted to make him feel welcome and special. I like thinking of Mikey as an apprentice or making him feel like a co-conspirator – I felt this impulse the most during the “secret of life” monologue. I wanted to stop working on the chair, invite him to sit down, and put my arm around his shoulders. I wanted to shock him a little by using profanity in a humorous way, emphasizing that this is an important lesson for him to learn.

In improvising the scene, I realized again that we were further along in having the lines memorized than we thought. It was helpful to drop into my imagination the memories Walter recounts to Mikey, most of which I could substitute with similar memories of my own: walking around Mr. Henrickson’s yard, picking up dog poop with a shovel and a bucket; delivering pizzas in a run-down light blue Plymouth Voyager (my personal understanding of a “crummy old van” (Carpenter 2.9.17)) and hoping people would tip. I remember having friends in high school who were completely obsessed with working in order to buy nice-looking (used) Ford trucks and would wash them every other day. I did not get it. I had the use of a nice car (compared to many

of my friends) because my parents were generous, and I was grateful for that, but I did not care about the status that it demonstrated. I think Walter is able to look back on these memories with amusement because those experiences enlightened him to the truth that every job is “picking up someone else’s shit” (Carpenter 2.9.21).

September 9, 2011 – Tonight, I got to finish up the Whelan Recording Technique work for Scenes Twelve and Fourteen. My goal tonight was to deepen Walter’s inner life struggle and work on action choices for each new piece of information that Helen reveals. Between reads, Amy asked me where it is that Walter has been going, and where he was today. I think Walter has been driving all over Los Angeles and just outside of it, looking for inspiration. I think he does drive frequently to the Los Padres National Forest. According to the *New Yorker* piece by George Plimpton, Larry Walters became a volunteer forest ranger and loved to hike and camp in the San Gabriel Mountains (66). According to the circumstances in the script, in the past two months Walter has been bracelet shopping, took the car to the shop to be fixed, and has looked into and ordered the parasails – which means he has probably driven out to the desert once or twice to pick out a spot. I imagine that he has gone to the beach several times and seen speedboats pulling people in parasails, and that is where he got the idea to try them. Amy made another suggestion to me about a place she knows on the coast where the shore has huge cliffs and people are known to hang-glide off of them, and the gliders look just like birds flying around the coastline. I used this thought and imagined that seeing this gave Walter ideas about modifying the parasail that he wants to get home and start writing down – so he can sketch and tinker. I like this moment before because in the living of the scene and the improvising, I came in with a very positive inner life that disarms me against Helen’s initial actions. A panic starts to set in that I have to work to hide from her and Mikey.

Amy asked me to try a couple of new things with the briefcase tonight. Keeping the circumstance of knowing that the briefcase is full of torn up cash, the second time Helen asks me, “What have you been doing” (Carpenter 2.12.26) my impulse is to take the briefcase and hide it away from her. I noticed that I wanted to hold on to it strangely, gripping it at the sides, close to my torso instead of holding it by the handle – I was guarding it. Because of this, Amy had me try ending the scene after Mikey had left by eating the twenty dollar bill then going to the briefcase and throwing it down violently in a huge swinging motion. I tried it, but did not feel connected to it at all. I think Amy felt that and we went back to taking the briefcase to the table and chewing the bill up into the briefcase there. I get the feeling that Amy is not totally satisfied with this either.

For Scene Fourteen, my goal was to deepen Walter’s need for Helen and the need to fly again because he is fighting for both in this scene. I am trying to work with a lot of ease and not force too much inner life so I do not get in that habit. My moment before work is helping to put me in a fragile place for this scene. Tonight, I imagined the time Walter has spent going over the clippings of Petit’s walks, wondering why he is not helping Walter right now, and thinking about how all his dreams are so far out of reach. I learned from the *New Yorker* article that Larry Walter’s favorite movie was *Somewhere In Time*, and he was fond of a book called *Time And Again* by Jack Finney. Both works are concerned with time travel (Plimpton 66-67). It seems that Larry thought about and probably wished that he could go back in time because nothing had happened in his life since his flight to top it. I think that is what Walter is feeling here and wants to fight that resignation in himself and Helen by saying “Does that mean I’ve used up my chances?” (Carpenter 2.14.24). Throughout the living and improvising of the scene with Helen, I can feel anger boiling in me – Shannon Webber does an excellent job of provoking that in me.

Between the suggestion that I am losing my mind and her criticism on “You didn’t think about it” (Carpenter 2.14.21) her apparent lack of compassion becomes too much – my impulse tonight was to slam my hands onto the table to scare her into being more gentle with me.

I am having trouble after Mikey enters and begins to accuse Walter of being a terrible father, because Walter says so little in response to Mikey for most of it – Helen usually responds to him. It must be hard for him to accept that Mikey has turned on him. When Mikey talks about his job and wanting to “provide,” I feel disbelief that he has completely rejected everything Walter tried to teach him and by extension he rejects Walter’s love (Carpenter 2.14.52). I still have not figured out how to make this more active.

September 11, 2011 – Tonight, we tried to make up the scenes we did not get to during the week to do the Whelan Recording Technique with them one last time. I got to rehearse Scenes Eight and Six.

Working Scene Eight is getting to be more fun. My goal was to work on actions that would make Helen feel taken care of. I am wondering why Walter decides to make up the lie about the holiday party. How he talks about it is interesting: “There’s a holiday party next month. For the families. You and Mikey can come. Eggnog. Carols.” (Carpenter 2.8.8) The short sentences suggest that he is making this up on the spot as the ideas occur to him. I made the choice to use the last two words as jokes to Helen because I believe she likes eggnog and hates caroling. I think Walter wants to make this place as real as possible for her so she will continue to be happy. The banter back and forth is getting to be really playful with sarcasm on both sides. In improvising it tonight, I suddenly felt a wave of guilt after her joke “He’s already at work making lots of money” (Carpenter 2.8.23) which I immediately needed to hide by being warmly serious in assuring her she did not need to worry about Mikey.

We worked another possibility for the end of this scene. We are considering the vision of the money as a theatrical representation of what is going on inside Walter, so Amy's new idea was to have an umbrella, like the one Petit uses, hiding behind or as part of the ironing board. My reaction to the money falling is now to guard myself by opening the umbrella and letting it shelter me. What was interesting about this idea was that it made me feel smug against the impending disaster, like I was smarter than my monetary opponent, and I started to smile. Amy said she needed to think about this.

We ended with another round of living Scene Six and then attempted to improvise it. It was rough – even having done the Whelan Recording Technique several times, it is still difficult to know when cue lines are because the scene is split between the two simultaneous conversations. We struggled through it, but I got a couple of ideas to work on from Amy. First, she said that Walter does appear to be lying, which we do not want. So, any and all anxiety he has about getting Helen to believe the lie must be hidden. I need to play positive actions. Amy suggested that Walter is actually good at lying – he is not happy about it, but he is doing it partially for the greater good of making Helen happy, relieving some of her burden, and that is motivation enough to commit to the lie. Second, Amy asked that I be more specific in my choice for the end of the scene (the inner life reveal). At this point, Helen has bought the lie and Walter says, “Something about this gives me a sense of – possibility” (Carpenter 1.6.164). Walter is ecstatic about how much time he will have to look for new flight invention opportunities. He sees Petit walking the wire and he is drawn to Petit because he craves the inspiration and wants to be up there with him. As I stood there watching Petit in my imagination tonight, I felt the determination to achieve that goal harden me and take me from happiness to anger. This choice, though it is hard to articulate effectively, feels very connected and open to me.

September 12, 2011 – Tonight we planned to work through the entire first act and then run it without stopping. We are no longer utilizing the Whelan Recording Technique, and we have agreed with Amy to work off-book, but not worrying too much about lines. We want to keep the kind of ease and freedom we utilized during the final improvisation stage of the Whelan Recording Technique. It is my responsibility to go back over my lines and notice where I am making mistakes so that I can correct them in future rehearsals. Tonight my goal was to work with ease in the strong connections I have found to my scene partners and Walter's primary need to get back "up."

In working the act, we tried new blocking ideas and Amy gave us notes to improve on moments. She is encouraging me to look for positive actions as often as possible, especially with Helen in the first and third scenes, when I have a strong tendency to push back at Helen when she insults me. I have been working on this, but it is difficult for me to make that choice in the moment, especially when Walter's language suggests negativity. In Scene Three when Helen says she wants me to get a job, point-blank, Walter's response is, "Goddammit. I have a job. I have work. I mean – Don't you think I'm trying? Goddamn. Goddamn. What do you imagine I do all day" (Carpenter 1.3.38). This is the most extreme case, but nevertheless, I am confused about how to believably choose a positive action when the language suggests an angry inner life and the desire to make her feel bad about hurting my feelings.

Amy suggested another interesting idea to consider for Walter's physical life. She asked me to consider Walter as a balloon that inflates and deflates. The idea is really helpful to the moment of Mikey telling Walter about the ultralite. I let the joy of flight fill me up while I get Mikey excited about the paramotor, and then when he tells me it has already been done, I deflate slowly into the chair. This then leads to a kind of objective – to fill myself back up with the hope

and joy I had in that possibility of flight. I think this will feed into and aid the work I am doing in Walter's childlike playfulness.

It felt really great to get through a run of Act One. I was able to start threading together the events of the two days for Walter in this act with a strong sense of his wanting to be up in the air again and being a hero in the eyes of his family. Amy seems very pleased with how well everyone is playing together, which is the most enjoyable aspect of this process so far. And thanks to the Whelan Recording Technique, we really do know pretty much all of our lines (with the exception of a few places).

September 13, 2011 – Tonight we worked and ran Act Two. My goal was to continue working with ease and deepening my connection in every moment to Shannon, Mason, and Liam to really provoke a strong feeling of loss by the end of the play. Most of the work tonight seemed to focus on adjusting staging.

Where we ran into difficulties were Scenes Fifteen and Sixteen. In Fifteen, I am having trouble with Walter's attack on Mikey and taking in the terribleness of that act. I do not yet feel truly guilty about the attack, and I found myself forcing the inner life a little bit for the rest of the scene. I think I need an "as if" for this event. For next time, I want to try it as if I had physically hurt my own wife.

Doing the end of Fifteen, after Mikey and Helen leave, I feel like I made good discoveries about Walter's new relationship to Petit. I felt it trigger when he said, "You have a feel for these things" (Carpenter 2.15.48). This is exactly what Walter wants to hear because he is so wracked with the guilt of everything he has done wrong, and Petit encourages him in the one thing he wanted to be good at. It felt as if I was getting validation from a parent. I felt incredibly grateful for the gift he was giving me, so when he said, "You're ready" (Carpenter

2.15.54) and I weighed the risk of harm against that gift, his faith in me gave me the permission to pursue “up” with everything I had left. This experience should be even more intense when my guilt is provoked more fully.

For the jump event, I wanted to test the “as if” of jumping into the gates of heaven. For Walter, the ultimate experience of peace and joy can only come from flying, and the greatest parallel that I can draw in my imagination to that is the experience of entering heaven. To me, there is something immensely satisfying about trying to imagine a joy that is unimaginable. I felt that this “as if” worked. To augment this, I also played with the Michael Chekhov concept of Expansion, since we have been practicing it in our movement class. This helps me keep an active feeling of movement even after I have reached the end of the stage. It is very similar to the balloon idea – this event is just the ultimate inflation.

Scene Sixteen was difficult because we have not actually worked on it since the first week of rehearsal, and I had forgotten to work on the lines. In spite of that, I did my best to make Helen feel like a co-conspirator in the greatest achievement man has ever known and truly enjoy the launch event. Shannon was flustered on lines too, so working the scene felt strained, but we did a much better job in the run of the act.

September 14, 2011 – We went back to Act One tonight and worked through the whole act focusing on notes Amy had given us earlier today. My chief goal for tonight was to look at Walter’s relationship to Petit in Scene Three and how it changes in Scene Five.

In Scene Three, I found that the heart of Walter’s action on Petit is begging him for inspiration, for the wisdom, the ability to be what he is: “Fearless” (Carpenter 1.3.21). I used the balloon physicality by deflating and inflating at the central event of that exchange. When Petit says the word “reward” I am reminded of my obstacle and deflate for “It’s hard to turn

inspiration into something lucrative, you know?” (Carpenter 1.3.18). Allowing the wisdom that a bird does not carry a wallet to inflate me gives my mind and body new strength and energy to continue sketching and searching for opportunities.

In Scene Five, we tried a couple of new business ideas and I think I found where the relationship changes. Amy wanted to try focusing on the bills and destroying them as the reaction to Petit’s brief appearance. Because of this I, as Walter, heard Petit’s line a little differently. At Petit’s appearance I started to experience an inner life similar to that of our last meeting: one of gratefulness, joy, and delight – and then I sourced “Everyone on Wall Street stopped trying to make money” (Carpenter 1.5.1) as a criticism. I felt challenged and a little ashamed. He leaves me without the inspiration I wanted and in a state of envy, which caused me to want to tear up the bills, the obstacle to my chance at being “a man in the sky” (Carpenter 1.5.2). We tried that idea without hitting the motor with the hammer, but after trying it, I advocated for doing both. In that moment, just tearing the bills did not do enough to satisfy my destructive impulse. The more terrible this impulse is, the greater need I will have to hide it from Helen when she calls down.

I talked to Amy a little bit before working Scene Three about the problem I was having finding positive actions on lines that felt negative (i.e. repeating “Goddamn”). She said that in our previous run of the first act, what she saw was Walter struggling to find a positive action and not being able to, which was good – the inner conflict is interesting. The problem is when the actions stay negative, it feels like he has stopped fighting for Helen’s vote of confidence and is just fighting against her. I think this note helped me quite a bit tonight.

September 15, 2011 – We worked through Act Two tonight, and my main goal was to work out more specific choices in moments throughout the act.

In Scene Eight, I wanted to find more specific ways to play with Helen and make her feel special and cared for. I had the impulse tonight to come up behind her and hold her hands as if they were holding a steering wheel and we “drove” through my directions to Los Padres. She got a kick out of that. We have decided that because of Walter’s new job, Helen has been much happier the past two months, and the physical intimacy of their marriage has come back. This circumstance causes us to play the jobs in the scene very playfully and suggestively. If one of us is not making the other feel bested, we are trying to turn the other one on. This puts me in an unsuspecting place to experience the money event at the end of the scene.

In Scene Nine, I wanted to work on taking in “Did you ever try to sell the chair” (Carpenter 2.9.24) and the moment leading to yelling at Mikey. Walter loves the chair, and he really does not want to give it to anyone, but this at least opens up the possibility to be seen as a hero again – to have his invention exhibited in the Smithsonian museum. The idea of selling it for money is ludicrous to Walter. No one can put a price on his achievement. That Mikey suggests it at all is funny at first – it is a silly, innocent mistake. The fact that he insists is bothersome. He uses the words “profit” and “advertise” (Carpenter 2.9.26-28) like some kind of business executive, and Walter has never heard him talk like that. After sourcing this in the scene, I want him to feel a little checked or ashamed, in a gentle way. Then when he becomes careless with the chair, I cannot contain my disgust and I end up making him feel punished with anger, which I immediately feel the need to hide after it comes out. This is getting better. What really helps is sourcing the moment right before it where Mikey moves away from me after I try to share my wisdom with him.

For Scene Twelve, there is a bit of a physical challenge at the end of the scene. With the line, “Everything *is* okay” (Carpenter 2.12.58) I want to make Mikey feel confident and secure,

and Amy agreed with this action but suggested that it becomes nearly impossible for me to do in that moment. She suggests that the fear of losing Helen and Mikey in that moment is too great for Walter to overcome fully. Apparently, at one point in our rehearsals, I was able to make that live truthfully, but it has not happened since, and she wants it. Physically, I start to attempt a gesture that will reinforce my confidence to Mikey but it does not get finished. Vocally, there is a wavering that only comes from a lack of conviction. Really the tricky part was finding the gesture, but I think I have one I am satisfied with.

After that moment, we have decided on the staging for eating the twenty-dollar bill. I will already be down center stage for that last moment with Mikey and after he leaves I have the impulse to get the bill out. I blame it for all the pain tonight and I want to destroy it thoroughly, so when tearing is not enough, I stuff the pieces into my mouth to chew and swallow them aggressively. I stand in front of the audience and have a moment of evaluation. Consuming my enemy did not make me feel any better.

September 16, 2011 – Tonight was our first full run-through of the play. My goal was to make sure my super-objective of getting back “up” would sustain a through-line for the whole play. It felt very good to do the whole thing.

I feel like I was able to get a pretty good understanding of Walter’s journey from beginning to end. He begins in a place of the greatest optimism – the dream is still possible. His family’s growing need for money stifles his ability to pursue his dream. Instead of giving up on the dream, he grows more desperate and becomes willing to risk his family’s security, believing he can win their support. When threatened with the consequence of actually losing his family because of his actions, the dream gets further out of reach, but he cannot give it up. He learns

that the pursuit of the dream made him destroy everything that he held dear. The pain of that guilt is too much to bear.

The super-objective absolutely works, but there are places where I feel like my inner life is not being provoked. I need to consider what is at stake for Walter. By the end, we understand that his life is truly at stake, but what happens if I feel that the stakes are life and death from the beginning?

September 18, 2011 – Tonight we worked through Act One again focusing on Amy's notes from the run-through. My chief goal, per Amy's suggestion, was to work on Walter's salesmanship. Before rehearsal, I did a little work thinking about what value still needed to be in place for me to want to pursue selling actions. Walter describes his lawn chair flight as "worthwhile" (Carpenter 2.14.24). A good salesman truly believes in the value of his product, so the pursuit of dreams must be considered the greatest possible pursuit. What should a salesman not do? A good salesman does not push customers away – he always wants to pull them in to share in the vision. This is the value I need in order to resist negative actions, or at least to resist the revelation of negative inner life.

In rehearsal, dropping in this value worked very well. I found that I wanted to inspire Helen and Mikey more frequently and with greater passion. Where it became difficult was in Scene Three. Amy had me work on the phone call by increasing salesmanship vocally while physically allowing the despair to set in. This was very challenging. We made a very specific blocking plan for the phone call in order to make the progression of Walter's disappointment and frustration very clear. It is going to take me a couple more rehearsals to be comfortable in this section.

In Scene Six, the salesmanship work really paid off. I want Helen to feel happy and confident in this lie, and it is easy here because I know this is what she wants. I am able to playfully improve the status of our relationship and allow for the freedom I need to continue looking for opportunities.

September 19, 2011 – In working on Act Two tonight, I wanted to continue to explore Walter’s salesmanship in light of the growing threat of impending doom and after the disaster hits. Amy felt that during the run on Friday, I gave up the fight for my dreams and the family too soon and too many times over, from Scene Twelve on. In Scene Twelve, I did not feel like I was giving up the fight, but I was letting myself get negative over Helen’s accusations too soon. Tonight I found that I actually could stay positive (at least in action) all the way up until “What do you know about what defines my life” (Carpenter 2.12.44) when her attacks become too hurtful to bear. For that scene, we also worked a bit more on how difficult it is to admit the truth to Mikey, without looking like I am giving up. It works much better if I take the time to decide whether or not I could lie to him before working to keep him on my side.

In Fourteen, we found some new ideas to really help the scene. First, our props master made me a scrapbook that lives with my box of newspaper clippings. The scrapbook contains the most precious of Walter’s papers, including the newspaper article that ran in the L.A. Times after the flight, and the original sketch of the flying lawn chair. I, as Walter, love these papers; they are the proof that I did “something worthwhile, something that meant something to me” (Carpenter 2.14.24). Seeing the sketch, especially, gives me a strong desire to turn back time to when the dream and the inspiration came easy. I want to treat the papers very tenderly, gently – Amy said that she really enjoys this choice. This new physical and emotional business really put me in a fragile state for Helen’s entrance.

Amy pushed me to dig deeper into how frightening the thought of Helen leaving is to Walter. It is difficult, but I think I am getting there with the “as-if” of losing my actual wife, Shannon. I think I have not given the fear that much thought because I, as Walter, keep feeling anger at Helen’s unwillingness to support me. Amy said that Walter’s inner life can really afford to jump all over the map in this scene because he is at his breaking point, but it is a mistake to not truly take in the fear of loss and choose actions from that place.

Our big problem tonight was trying to find the most effective blocking once Mikey had entered. I had been having a huge problem with feeling inactive for much of this section because Walter does not say anything, and too often that leads to inactive impulses to sit at the table and take in Mikey’s tirade. Amy has said that it looks like Walter has given up the fight in those moments. In trying new blocking ideas, we found new impulses that really helped the life of the scene. Amy encouraged Mason to let Mikey lose control of his inner life a little bit and let that feed into more movement – more of a tirade on the verge of violence. We also created a nice blocking moment where I go to Mikey and kneel in front of where he is sitting to make him feel taken care of on “Mikey, what’s going on, son?” (Carpenter 2.14.51). I worked on letting this impulse continue, and working at that same action even as Mikey shuts down my attempts. “You don’t do very much. You don’t do anything” (Carpenter 2.14.52) hits me pretty hard, and I want to sit because of it, but as he continues and I see how much pain he is in, I want to work to alleviate it. I want to go to him and hug him to calm him down, but he evades me and gets more upset. At no point can I give up the fight to keep my son from turning against me. This took us quite a bit of rehearsal time to figure out.

The work we did in Scene Nine tonight actually mirrored what we would achieve in Scene Fourteen. Mason and I both are working on salesman-like actions, and in Nine, Mason is

really starting to get stronger. The more he pushes positively for money, working, or the idea of selling the chair, the more uncomfortable and bewildered I become at this change in him. I realized tonight that I do not recognize him when he is talking like this, and that is what provokes me to challenge him. I want him to feel ashamed for being obsessed with money.

We have a new ending to Scene Eight. In addition to Walter seeing the money rain and wanting to guard against the threat, Amy requested that a solitary dollar bill fall from the sky which Walter catches. In my imagination, this is a really powerful event because as Walter, I start to think, “I just burned this dollar bill. Why is it back?” The idea behind this change is that the “money rain” is purely a vision in Walter’s mind, that he knows is not really there, but the arrival of the physical bill is something that he cannot ignore. Performing the scene, that event really does terrify me. The real challenge will be making sure I can catch a drifting, flipping, rolling piece of paper every night.

September 20, 2011 – Before our run-through tonight, Amy wanted to work Scene Fourteen a little bit more in order to solidify our blocking choices from last night and deepen the fight with Helen. Tonight was an incredible lesson in playing action with abandon. Amy challenged me to really let the possibility of losing Helen shake me to the core, and I took some time to drop that in. Then I found the key at the top of the monologue “I was trying to do the right thing” (Carpenter 2.12.24). I wanted so desperately to inspire her again, to make her feel adoration, and I have never performed this section so impulsively before. Thoughts came faster and the attack on lines was sharper. I experienced a much broader spectrum of inner life, and it came from wanting to play positive actions instead of the negative inner life.

The major thing I wanted to work on for the run was dropping in more specific sensory images for the flight story. I noticed that I was calling for line in the same places almost every

time because I had not built in the specific memories to complete the thread. I went back and imagined everything as Walter describes it. I started with the dream: it was an out-of-body dream where I saw myself sitting in the chair, comfortably, cross-legged as the balloons tied to it lifted me up. For the memory, I went back and imagined the process for filling the balloons. I could see all forty-two of the balloons, not yet inflated, laid out all over the yard – red on green. Each time I inflated one and tied it off to the chair, I would watch it float up and stop with a jerk at the top of the line. In the launch, I remember my heart beating out of my chest. I remember checking the altimeter at two thousand feet and realizing I could not hear anything. When I listened closer, I could hear the faint sound of air moving – the “sound of the sky” (Carpenter 1.4.108). The peace of that was incredible, beyond description. Everything I saw below me was arranged perfectly and easily recognizable. One half of the world was land, including the straight lines and angles of Los Angeles, the varied coastline, the majestic San Gabriel Mountains rising up to meet me and the Mojave desert, bright in the sun. The other half was the entire Pacific Ocean, the most vibrant blue flaked with white in the sunshine. It stretched on forever. When I looked back at the land, I recognized a deep green expanse of trees as the Angeles National Forest. It looked like a bathmat I used to have, but much prettier.

I imagined getting so caught up in the view that I forgot to check the altimeter for a while, until discovering I had gone from 2,500 to 6,000 feet. I imagined checking the altimeter every few seconds after that and feeling even more excited every thousand-foot marker I passed. I remember watching the little red and white bi-plane putter beneath me. It looked like a Micro Machine. The air smelled cold, brisk, and clean, but soon became hard to get enough of. I had not thought about it, but it was cold. I could not feel my toes. At that point, I realized I was a little too high. With the slightest bit of sadness, I shot up at the balloons with the air pistol and

hit seven of them. The sound was not unlike popping a party balloon. Then suddenly, I got pushed sideways and gripped the chair as tight as I could. I watched the pistol disappear like the old Wile E. Coyote cartoons, but without the impact. In his interview with Plimpton, Larry Walters confessed that he had brought backup B.B.'s and CO₂ cartridges for the gun, but "it never dawned on me that I'd actually lose the gun itself" (qtd. in Plimpton 65). As scared as I (Walter) was, the irony in this lapse of preparation was a little funny to me at the time. I remember hoping no one got hit.

When the air traffic controller radioed me, I could not help but be proud. He could not understand that someone would be flying, but not in a plane, and I wanted to shove that freedom in his face. Having lost the air pistol, I was seriously considering abandoning ship and using the parachute. It would have been fun, but I really did not want to leave the chair. I was enjoying the view quite a bit. When I felt the chair losing altitude, I knew that the helium had begun to leak, and truthfully, I was a little sad. I did not really want to go down yet. Slowly, I could hear the silence of the air being invaded by L.A. noise pollution, the "sounds of the normal world" (Carpenter 1.4.144). It was strange, but I swear I could hear children laughing, playing outside. Sadness was soon replaced by adrenaline as my descent quickened. In a frenzy, I cut all the water jugs, but the ground was getting closer faster anyway, so I braced myself for a rough landing. I remember the sound and the feel of the friction when I scraped across a roof and the jerk when the balloons got caught. As I swung, I laughed at how I did not even truly land. I got stopped eight feet above the ground.

Taking the time to drop all this in really allowed me to have fun with the story tonight and tell the story much more specifically. I love inspiring and teasing my family and getting new people (Maria) excited about it.

September 21, 2011 – Tonight, Amy wanted to look at specific scenes and adjust blocking and moments. I made a few interesting discoveries through the work tonight. First, in Scene Four, I found a much better source for “Oh hell, Mikey, no one wants to get into all that” (Carpenter 1.4.58). I had always been flattered at how excited Mikey gets telling Maria about the chair, but for the first time tonight, I actually saw Helen’s reaction. She had just talked about her old mail routes and how proud she used to feel and I really felt the need to make up with her. When Mikey starts to tell Maria about what I have done, I saw Helen look coldly at me before going back to her food. Suddenly I was torn between making it up to Helen and indulging Mikey (and my own pride). Maria’s curiosity cast the winning vote, but I realized that this could be a way to win Helen back.

In Scene Six, I took Walter’s selling actions even further, and showed no sign of anything being wrong (until “Don’t talk it to death” (Carpenter 1.6.149)). I was able to find some fun physicality in retelling how I impressed the Los Padres Chamber of Commerce to really make Helen feel relief and confidence in me. I kept up the façade even when Helen was out of the room because I was on a roll and did not want to break the illusion for anything. Ultimately, I think this is the best choice for the scene as a whole.

The most important activity tonight was working with Liam face to face. Except for Scene Fifteen, we do not get to look at each other in the Walter/Petit scenes, and it has caused us to lose a little specificity as we have progressed. We worked each scene only once, sitting across from one another and taking time to drop in the necessary circumstances for each scene. This really helped me to solidify the progression of the relationship between Walter and Petit. It starts with wonder and admiration in Scene Three for pulling me out of feeling like a failure. In Scene Five, I want him to pull me out of my financial obligations with inspiration but he makes me feel

ashamed and angry at what I have become. This leads to desperation and determination. After two months, I need him to help me keep my eye on the prize because I am anxious about the lie, wondering how much longer I can keep it up. It is in Scene Eight that he plants the seed urging me to pursue the dream until death because that is the best way to end. This does not alleviate my anxiety, but gives me hope. Liam has done an incredible job of capturing Petit's grandiose gift of inspiration, and sitting with him tonight has given me some good image work to use from now on.

September 22, 2011 – During the day, ZFX finished installing the rigging for the flying chair, and I was asked to come in for the safety briefing and so that we (Amy, Shannon, the flight crew and I) could establish and practice everything that was going to happen for the flight in Scene Sixteen. Flying in the chair is so incredible. Amy requested that the chair rise and then appear to be blown stage left by wind, so I lift off the ground quickly and then swing left, still lifting and accelerating. The ride is absolutely exhilarating. I had so much fun today just being lifted twenty feet in the air, and I am hoping to continue to use these joyful sensations every night of the run.

This evening's rehearsal started with an audio recording session with our sound designer, Will Eubanks, to record the radio transmissions heard in Scenes Four and Sixteen. Liam and I did the exchange between Walter and the air traffic controller first. My objective in this scene-within-the-scene has always been to shove in this guy's face that I am up in the air without the aid of a plane. I imagined still riding the adrenaline high of the launch and being sixteen thousand feet in the air. I felt incredibly proud of my flying machine already, and I enjoyed every second of the controller's disbelief.

After recording that exchange a couple times, we tackled Walter's final lines of the play to Helen, after the launch. Right before we recorded, I noticed something interesting Bridget Carpenter had included in the script that I had not noticed before. All of my lines before the launch are designated as "Young Walter." All of the lines after the launch (i.e. what we were recording) are designated as "Walter." Seeing this confirmed for me that the launch made Walter into the person he was for the rest of his life. This is the playwright's little nudge to say, "this is a life changing event, do not ignore this moment." I delivered the lines with the objective and action that I had chosen, living in that strong joyful relationship to flying and trying to get Helen to share in the joy of flying. We recorded it three times, and I tried to deepen the connection with each try and fight harder to preserve the event. Amy and I agreed that the third go felt very good.

After the recording, we had a run through.

Some notes from Amy to consider for tomorrow:

- Scene 1
 - Keep the physical moment of connection for "I picked you..." (Carpenter 1.1.26)
 - In the paramotor chair, run in a circle around Mikey and end in the same place, downstage right.
 - Do not sit across from Mikey, stay standing and work.
- Scene 3
 - Sell "It's not what I'm supposed to do." (Carpenter 1.3.48)
 - Be careful with physical moments of defeat during phone call; make sure they are specific and not all the same.

- Scene 4
 - Keep banter with Helen competitive.
 - Do not blow the chair too far stage left.
- Scene 5
 - Try entering on stair unit.
 - Stay at table for “Fine” and “Everything’s fine.” Do not yell up the stairs until “Don’t come down.” (Carpenter 1.5.4)
- Scene 6
 - Cheat out; do not upstage yourself in talking to Helen.
 - Keep vocal energy and attack up to draw focus faster and clearer.
 - New end of six?
- Scene 8
 - Run for cover in exit.
- Scene 12
 - New staging
- Scene 14
 - Really go for it – believe you can sell her on the dream
- Scene 15
 - “Do you think so?” (Carpenter 2.15.49) was too soft.

September 23, 2011 – Tonight was our last run-through before technical rehearsals.

Along with incorporating all of Amy’s other notes, the main goal tonight was to take Amy’s note about selling the line “It’s not who I am! It’s not what I’m supposed to do” (Carpenter 1.3.48), and look for more opportunities like this to resist the impulse to release inner life frustration and

find a positive action. I feel like I have come a long way in being aware of and working on this personal actor habit, and Amy says she enjoys seeing this struggle in Walter. I felt a really strong shift tonight in that line, in containing the inner life and choosing to make Helen feel proud. I think that pushing strongly for positive action choices makes my inner life more vulnerable to the obstacles and defeats that get dealt to me.

I made the mistake tonight of forgetting the dollar bill that I eat at the end of Scene Twelve. I realized I had forgotten it part of the way through the scene, so when the moment came, I took a moment of evaluation alone on stage, living with the possibility of losing Helen and Mikey and then stormed off stage with the briefcase. It was the same basic event without being able to attack the money. I was still mad at myself for doing that. I need to make a prop check list for myself for each scene.

Notes from Amy to consider for the next run:

- Scene 1
 - Put back in the business of sitting and looking at Helen through the legs of the paramotor chair. The playfulness is fun.
 - The pause after Mikey's line, "...like you were" (Carpenter 1.1.71) was a little too long tonight.
- Scene 3
 - This scene went very well tonight. Keep fighting for positive actions.
- Scene 4
 - "I said, 'I want to do this thing'" (Carpenter 1.4.82). This line lacks specificity and attack.
- Scene 5

- More ripping of the bills, and stay out for the outburst and aftermath
- Scene 6
 - Find better motivation for the cross away from Helen on “It’s on the edge of the Los Padres National Forest...” (Carpenter 1.6.140)
- Scene 8
 - New bill burning business.
- Scene 12
 - Build up the process of fighting for Mikey’s approval starting with “She seemed to want that” (Carpenter 2.12.53). The line prior to that is still transition of being guarded from Mikey.
 - Make sure you have the dollar bill to eat!
- Scene 15
 - The action on “Tell me something incredible that your real husband did today...” (Carpenter 2.15.21) needs to be different. Shannon has changed Helen’s relationship to the event with the fireman, and it looked like I did not take that in.
 - “I always felt like I was good at making things...” (Carpenter 2.15.51) was lost tonight, too low in volume and taking it all to Petit cuts the audience off from it.

September 24, 2011 – Tonight, we began our technical rehearsals with Cue-to-Cue. My goal for today was to be patient and as helpful as possible to the design and technical teams as they made adjustments. It was really great to be able to take in what the lights, sound, and projections were doing throughout the show. The music that plays during scenes with Petit is

really fun, and should be helpful to a joyful inner life. We were able to work out an effective (and safe) arrangement for burning the bill in Scene Eight, which is good because I am finding that event really helpful to Walter's inner life. I was eager to get to Walter's jump in Scene Fifteen, but that is where we ended the day, and should be where we will start tomorrow.

September 25, 2011 – Tonight was one of the smoothest Stop-And-Go rehearsals I have been a part of. We got to finish setting the cues for the end of Scene Fifteen and Scene Sixteen and then got in a full run with very few pauses. I did my best to incorporate Amy's notes from Friday into this run.

I had a little trouble with making "I want to do this thing" (Carpenter 1.4.82) in Scene Four more specific. When did I say this to Helen? I said it on our first date. What is "this thing?" I am talking about my goal to fly. What action did I play on her in that moment in the past? I wanted to make her feel excited, inspired. What action could I be playing now in bringing it up? I want her to feel the rush she felt when the thought was new. This is essentially how I have already been thinking about this moment, the problem is I get hung up on the moment before when Helen says, "I was pretending" (Carpenter 1.4.81). I have been taking this in and letting it frustrate me, partially because I really enjoy her wit, and the action becomes wanting her to feel topped, or at least like she is not winning the volley.

In Scene Fifteen, I made sure to source truthfully from Helen for "You can move in with your other family" (75) and the lines after it. Tonight, as soon as the fireman walked away Helen broke down crying. My action in that moment became to make her laugh and feel loved. In begging for what her real husband did, I was begging for a way to erase all the damage I had caused. I was begging for forgiveness.

Some notes from Amy:

- Scene 4
 - Make stronger physical choices for banter with Helen
- Scene 5
 - Try making it more difficult to recover during “Fine...” (Carpenter 1.5.4)
 - New blocking idea for the end of the scene: after cleaning up, go to the chair, pick it up, hug it and look up. Exit when lights change.
- Scene 6
 - Be turned out more for “Were there any messages today?” (Carpenter 1.6.142)
- Scene 8
 - Bigger (more romantic) physical action choice for stopping Helen and giving the bracelet.
- Scene 9
 - “...shinier” (Carpenter 2.9.19). Lost the end of the word.
- Scene 12
 - Adjust the stage right cross in pursuit of Helen as she exits.
 - Look out at the audience before eating the bill. Let them see the moment of decision.
- Scene 15
 - Do not collapse behind the parasail box! (I knew it was wrong as soon as I did it.)
 - Be ready for a longer hold of flying. Find an active choice to sustain it.

September 26, 2011 – Tonight felt strange because normally, this would be our first dress rehearsal. But apparently Amy is really happy with where we are and wanted to give most of the crew a night off after a successful tech weekend. We did have costume crew with us for

the beginning of the rehearsal to run quick changes. My most challenging change happens between Scenes Fifteen and Sixteen – this is the transformation from Walter to Young Walter. I will be wearing my Young Walter costume underneath Walter’s clothes for the last few scenes, and as soon as I exit after Walter’s death jump, my dressers and I have to take off the parasail, strip the Walter costume off, change shoes, wipe away the middle-age makeup, and add the flight vest to be onstage for the beginning of Scene Sixteen. We practiced it a few times with the goal of thirty seconds, and we made that, so we feel pretty good. After quick-change rehearsal, Amy worked on fine-tuning certain blocking that she still was not satisfied with, throughout the show. I am really looking forward to our first dress rehearsal.

September 27, 2011 – My goal for tonight’s first dress rehearsal was to continue to live truthfully in every moment and allow the addition of costumes to make offerings and generate new impulses. The greatest help I found in the costumes was the difference between Walter’s normal clothes in the beginning of the show and his “business” wear. In the beginning, Walter wears loose fitting jeans and large shirts (larger than I personally wear) which are really comfortable, easy to move in, and feel like working clothes. They are clothes I would not be afraid to get dirty from working on projects, and I feel much more playful in them. The suit is not so comfortable. In reality, the suit fits just fine, but as Walter, I do not like wearing it. It is restrictive and too formal. In rehearsals leading up to this, I wore a rehearsal jacket and tie as often as possible, but the actual costume feels very foreign to me, which is helpful. Walter wears it for Helen’s benefit, but really wants to change out of it as soon as possible. I felt this the most in Scene Six. After the intermission, I really was uncomfortable in my costume because I have to wear my flight harness under everything, but I do think this is helpful to Walter’s growing anxiety.

Overall, I felt very good about our first dress rehearsal. Some notes from Amy for tomorrow:

- Scene 1
 - Be downstage of Helen to show her the plans when she is in the chair.
 - "...like you were" (Carpenter 1.1.71). This moment felt too heavy tonight.
 - Cross around the table to be near Helen on "I picked you..." (Carpenter 1.1.26)
- Scene 4
 - Go back to the choppy delivery of "I think I'd like a tomato sandwich."
(Carpenter 1.4.24)
 - "I knew it" (Carpenter 1.4.84) needs a different attack.
 - Change delivery of "Huh." (Carpenter 1.4.121)
 - Do not give the cop an accent.
 - Laughter overtook the text too often.
- Scene 6
 - Make sure standing and crossing away on "It's on the edge..." (Carpenter 1.6.140)
- Scene 12
 - I got too close to Mikey too fast after Helen leaves. Slow this down.
- Scene 14
 - "This is what we have..." (Carpenter 2.14.8) needs to be more active.
- Scene 15
 - Fight the desire to cry, especially during lines. Do not squash the inner life, but resist the urge to indulge.

September 28, 2011 – After considering Amy’s notes from last night, it seemed like I was a little too liberal with inner life and not focused enough on actions. And apparently, when I was focused on actions, I made new choices that were unnecessary. So tonight’s goal was to be mindful not to get so carried away with playing inner life, make sure I am playing action, and trust the choices and discoveries that I have made already. The little details do not need to change.

We have not gotten notes from Amy yet, but I have an idea of what she might say. Scene Fifteen felt very strange tonight, I think because we had all gotten the note about crying and were all trying to take it. Unfortunately, we may have gone too far. I had to decided that my offstage preparation for Scene Fifteen last night was too strong, so tonight I deliberately backed off my preparation but when the scene began, I instantly felt like I was not truly provoked enough. Both Shannon and Mason were dealing with this too, and since I typically let their heartache fuel the fire for mine, we did not go very far emotionally. I am pretty sure this led me to push the inner life for the rest of the scene – my attack on Mikey and the breakdown after they leave were particularly weak. We will see what Amy has to say.

September 29, 2011 – Here were Amy’s notes to consider for the final dress rehearsal:

- Scene 1
 - Get more downstage for showing the plans to Helen.
 - Do not look down at the drawings between “...thinking about other things” and “Yeah” (Carpenter 1.1.48-50). Make it clear that you have to deal with the topic of Mikey’s question.
- Scene 4

- Try taking “I said, ‘I want to do this thing’” (Carpenter 1.4.82) to Maria instead of Helen.
- “I thought, ‘Huh.’” (Carpenter 1.4.121) Still did not work last night. It was too casual. It should be humorously ironic with the action “to make them laugh.”
- Scene 8
 - You will have a wallet to hold the money for both scenes from now on.
- Scene 12
 - Your last cross before “...he finds Atlantis” (Carpenter 2.12.41) feels stagey. Try taking the bank statement from her to motivate it better.
- Scene 14
 - Please try a very strong action tonight on the section “this is our home, this is what we have.” Essentially, we need to understand how greatly he values this family, so that the loss when he goes “Up” again feels even stronger.
 - This scene is always wonderful, but last night it lost a little something of the sense that you are both trying to find a way to save this, or see if it is salvageable.
- Scene 15
 - I thought you did a great job of taking my note about not crying. Perhaps a little too great. The impulse should be there, I think, just fought against...perhaps slightly less well than you did last night. And Helen will need to understand that something is falling terribly apart for Walter before she says, we will come back. And perhaps my note about crying should really be: do not let resisting crying keep you from just as much fragility or vulnerability.

- More fierceness in your lines to Mikey after the attack. And we will work the attack tonight, but it needs to be even more aggressive. Then, I think we will need the moment of Walter understanding what he has just done.

So my evaluation of Scene Fifteen last night was fairly accurate. Holding back on the offstage preparation work was a mistake. Tonight my goal will be to deepen my preparation and allow the inner life, especially in Scenes Fourteen and Fifteen, to be vulnerable and responsive, but always make sure that it is not overtaking action in the moments when it is not supposed to.

We met briefly with Amy before our call time in order to look at Scene Fifteen and the attack on Mikey. It was hard to drop into this scene without having gone through the rest of Walter's journey that night, but it was helpful. Amy told me to really go for taking out all of the guilt and regret that I have on Mikey, punishing him the way I wish I could punish myself. It got a little better, with a greater sense of danger that Amy was looking for, and I think I was able to go even further during the run.

I felt very good about this final dress. The places where I have been having the most difficulty – the top of Three, the first half of Fourteen, and all of Fifteen – all felt successful. I will be working to keep up the progress made in these sections during the run, but I feel like I am in a good place. Here are Amy's final notes:

- Scene 5
 - Physically, take one more moment with the entire stack of bills before Petit enters. Take in that burden.
- Scene 6

- Physically motivate “I need to change” (Carpenter 1.6.93) and the exit. Maybe something with the mayonnaise?
- Cross upstage after “...new businesses in the area” (Carpenter 1.6.140). Do not block Mikey on his line.
- Scene 8
 - Remember to lay the iron flat so it does not fall in the transition.
 - Go back to the old way of stopping Helen to give the bracelet.
- Scene 15
 - Volume got slightly too low tonight. Be careful. Especially on “Some parasails have motors.” (Carpenter 2.15.45)
 - Consider the depth of fifteen years of “sorry.”
 - Consider a greater journey of inner life for the jump to sustain the moment, either from pain to joy or vice versa. Take time to see what Walter is seeing as he flies.

I am so excited to open this show. Usually, around this time for any other show I would be thinking, “I wish we had one more rehearsal.” Part of me actually wishes we had opened already. I am so proud of this production and cannot wait to share it with an audience.

D. The Performance

September 30, 2011 – We opened the show tonight and, with the exception of one major technical setback, it was wonderful. The stage left wagon somehow came off of its track right before Scene Ten when it needed to be onstage as Maria’s living room. Mason and Jordan went out and performed the scene on a bare stage (wonderfully, I was told) and the show continued

smoothly, so it really did not affect me directly. It did put a damper on things for our stage managers and the crew for a while, which was unfortunate.

My goals tonight were to have fun sharing this story with an audience and work to improve the consistency of my trouble spots. I was nervous about the phone call at the beginning of Scene Three, and I do not think my selling actions were as strong as they have been. But I felt well connected to the disappointment of not getting the job and my retaliation of “People who have pilot licenses do not fully appreciate being up in the air” (Carpenter 1.3.2) into the phone got some light laughter, so I was encouraged. The rest of the scene with Petit felt magical (I heard soft ooh’s and ahh’s on his entrance) and the argument with Helen felt stronger than it ever has. So by that point, I knew we were cooking with gas.

Throughout the show I was able to take Amy’s final business and blocking notes and found that they were all very helpful either as a source (taking a moment with the stack of bills) or as an action choice. In Scene Six, “accidentally” getting mayonnaise on my hands gave me a very light, positive action to play on Helen, making her laugh and continue to feel good about the future, while I really was stalling for time and composure in creating the lie.

I felt really good about Scenes Twelve and Fourteen tonight. In Fifteen, taking in the idea that I have been nothing but a disappointment for fifteen years really took me to the darkest place I have been in this process, and I feel really good about the level of aggressiveness that it generated for the attack. The shame that hit in the realization of what I had done was even stronger, which really fueled the fight to make Mikey feel valuable again and put me in an extremely fragile state for Mikey’s exit and Helen’s promise to come back.

Before the show, I thought about what it meant to have a greater journey of inner life during the jump and since I had been pursuing that action with the expectation of the greatest

possible relief and joy, I decided to delay that result and start the jump in pain. In the performance, when I got to the end of the stage to jump, I imagined that everything happened in slow motion. At first I felt the fear of not knowing what would happen, but as I went up I saw the world around me getting smaller, the clouds and stars getting closer, and it slowly set into me that I was free from pain and the weight of the world forever. I allowed my arms to slowly arc down and out to the sides, as though they were wings to help give me lift. What I felt is difficult to describe, but for as long as the lights were on I just kept thinking how beautiful it was to be up again, and let that thought fill me more and more with joy. Honestly, the most helpful thing in imagining the beauty in that moment is the music that is playing. Our sound designer, Will Eubanks, made the most gorgeous choice for this moment, and I cannot thank him enough for it.

And after the beauty of that moment, the rush of Scene Sixteen was welcome and easy as pie. I feel so great about this show and cannot wait to do it again tomorrow.

October 1, 2011 – Before the performance tonight, Amy asked for a couple of minutes to adjust the collapse moment in Scene Fifteen, which I think makes for a much easier progression. I no longer have to cross all the way to the box with the parasail. I just start walking out to just left of center stage and let the pain collapse me there. The realization of Petit’s presence works the same, but I do not consider the parasail until he asks about it. I thought that collapsing at the box made sense before, but this actually feels so much easier.

Tonight’s performance felt even better than last night. I feel really good about the consistency of my performance and how everyone in the cast is continuing to let the really great moments live truly and powerfully. A lot of my favorite moments are getting even better, which is hard to believe, and we are finding new ones. On her exit in Scene One, Shannon found a way to top my “GOODBYE. ‘Darling’” (Carpenter 1.1.40) with having Helen respond to my attempt

to alleviate the tension by trying to make me laugh, putting on her hat and posing for her “Goodbye, darling” (Carpenter 1.1.41) in a cutesy way. And tonight’s audience was even more responsive to the existing jokes. I got a pretty good laugh in Scene Four on “Maria wanted to hear the story. I thought we’d all stare at it while I told her...” (Carpenter 1.4.75). So far, my stamina and energy level have felt pretty good. No problems vocally. I hope everything continues to go this smoothly.

October 2, 2011 – Today was our first Sunday matinee of the run, which typically means a smaller audience and lower energy. The audience was smaller, but responsive, and I did not feel the drag I normally would. In talking to my cast mates, it is evident that everyone really loves doing this show. It is exhausting, but I think that the love of this play and wanting to play these characters and tell this story really helps us come in with high energy every day. I am just as proud of today’s performance as I am of the previous two. A day’s break will be welcome, though.

October 4, 2011 – After a day away from *Up*, it was nice to come in and have a very simple, stripped-down pick-up rehearsal. Amy told us how thrilled she was with the opening weekend, and really put it up to us whether we wanted to rehearse or not. We agreed on a line-through, only doing blocking for certain scenes (Six and Fourteen). I really enjoyed doing this so informally, because even though we were sitting on the floor of the stage, I still felt free to move a little bit and connect honestly with my scene partners. Allowing myself to work with so much ease in this rehearsal reminded me that I was not always necessarily doing it in performance. That is something to look for tomorrow.

October 5, 2011 – I think the break and the line-through last night really did wonders for the show tonight. My goal was to work with the level of ease and freedom I felt last night, now

under the pressures of a full performance. I do not think I was able to keep that sense the entire show, but I did for most of it and I felt very powerfully connected to Walter's journey because of it. I felt myself fighting and wanting to sell the dream more and more desperately and looking for Helen and Mikey to see me as the hero more often. I feel really good about this performance as a measure of my growth.

This was also our first predominantly student audience, so we were curious about how they would react to this play. They laughed much more frequently at the moments that were intended to be funny, and I think they were more apparently shocked by certain moments. Tonight was the first night I have heard audible gasps when I started to burn the twenty-dollar bill, and chuckles when I ate the next one.

The one place where I am afraid I am having trouble vocally is at the very end as I am being lifted in the chair. I feel that I may be getting too carried away with the sensation and pushing too hard on my voice in the laughter. I have not really thought about it until now, but it might be something to be careful of tomorrow. I want the laughter to be clear and not raspy.

October 6, 2011 – We had another student audience tonight with energy similar to last night. I have been able to keep my performances consistent and alive the past two nights, which is great. A small error led to a new inner life in Scene Six for me tonight. Echo accidentally skipped a large chunk of her text as Aunt Chris, and as soon as I noticed it I realized she was suddenly seconds away from my entrance cue and I was nowhere near my entrance. I had to run as fast as I could on the balls of my feet, trying to avoid making loud steps backstage, in order to get to my stage right entrance, pump the brakes, and walk onstage since she had been drawing out my entrance cue waiting for me to enter. This meant Walter would appear to have been hurrying into the house in order to tell Helen the good news about the job. I wish I had handled

this and justified the change a little better. I am afraid it looked like the error that it was and not a choice.

I felt better about my voice tonight. Thinking about the strain last night, made me want to make sure I was open and not pushing for all of my loud moments, including the chair launch and when I yell at Helen and Mikey. The most important part of that was focusing on the recipient of my action and releasing my voice in order to change them. The best way to remove vocal tension is to focus on partner.

October 7, 2011 – Tonight’s performance was the night for technical mishaps that directly affected my scenes. We started off with the major surprise of the paramotor prototype not working. I flipped the switch and the fan did not start. Shannon brilliantly delivered “Is something supposed to happen?” (Carpenter 1.1.13) to fit the truth of the moment, and I floundered for a second, wanting to be able to justify my next line. I said something like, “Well, the fan’s supposed to come on,” and then continued with the normal line, and it was not as elegant as I would have liked. I spent the rest of the scene living with that circumstance, that the prototype was not working yet, and it worked out fairly well after the initial surprise. It was a nice bit of extra fuel in the fire for the scene.

Next came the problem of the rogue milk jug. When I exited the stage with the old lawn chair after Scene Five, I found out that one of the ropes had come untied and a milk jug was left on stage. As stage managers and actors debated back stage what to do about it, I decided to make it that night’s motivation for the stage left cross that had been so troublesome during Scene Six. It made some sense. The milk jug had to exist in the Griffin house, not Maria’s place, and since it is a part of my chair, I would want to reattach it. In the moment before my line, I looked out to discover the jug and crossed to retrieve it as I started the line. After picking it up, I

realized I was able to use it as part of the action on "...told them a little bit about me – what I've done..." (Carpenter 1.6.140). I shook the jug playfully at Helen as I crossed back to her. I put the jug on the table when it was no longer useful or fun to play with, and it went offstage with the rest of the wagon at intermission. So I got to add some playful business and saved an assistant stage manager an embarrassing trip onstage.

The rest of the show went very well, though our audience tonight was not as responsive as previous ones. After being caught off guard in Scene One, I made sure to consider the truth of every moment for the rest of the play, which served me especially well in the later, more emotional scenes.

October 8, 2011 – I was particularly excited about this evening's performance because my family came. My goal tonight was to play with ease and trust my work up to this point because I tend to get nervous and want to "try harder" for my family. I knew that would lead to pushing and/or over-indulging in inner life and I made a conscious effort to work with ease, focusing on my partners. Because of that, I did feel that tonight's performance was especially successful. My experience of Walter's journey was the strongest it has been. In my breakdown in Scene Fifteen, I did not feel like I was over-indulging in the despair; I fought to overcome the despair and lost. My experience of that was much deeper tonight. And the lower low led to a higher high in the jump, and in the chair launch. I am very proud of my work tonight – and sad that I only get to do it one more time.

October 9, 2011 – Our last performance felt particularly emotional, I think, because most of the performers were really living with the sadness of it being the last show. We all loved it so much, we did not want it to end. As we got into Scene Fourteen and Fifteen, it was clear that Shannon/Helen's heart was broken a little more than usual, and that made it harder for me to rein

it in. We probably fell too far into the crying trap in Fifteen, though we were not supposed to. Scene Sixteen was truly bittersweet, and I wanted to savor every little look on Helen's face as we prepared for launch. I gave the lift off everything I had left and it felt great. After our curtain call, the whole cast immediately took a long group hug, thanking each other for all the generosity, hard work, and love that each gave. This truly is the reward of our craft. The love it breeds in our audiences and each other. This is why I am an actor.

E. Afterthoughts

Looking back on the process of creating and performing Walter, I am truly proud. I received high praises from many of my colleagues, my students, and even random strangers who stopped me on the street to tell me how much they enjoyed it. That is not what I am proud of. Our cast all but unanimously voted that they would do this show for so much longer than two weeks, given the opportunity. I had fun every single night because I loved this story and my cast mates gave generously of themselves in order to tell it. That is what I am proud of.

The work in this production has been wonderfully beneficial to my craft by leading me to a stronger, clearer distinction between what it means to play action and what it means to just release inner life onto partner. Walter is the most optimistic person I have ever had to become, especially faced with such emotional difficulties. For the longest time I thought that as an actor I was doing my best work when I was allowing myself to experience high levels of emotion and the audience was able to share in that with me. That is not what an audience is truly interested in; that is not action. With Walter, had my director not pushed me to pursue positive action instead of indulging in the turmoil that was his inner life, no one would have liked Walter. What I love about Walter is how much he loves his family and his dream. Audiences are drawn to him

and pity him because they see him trying to have both with a kind heart, but the obstacles are too great. While this was not always my first impulse in the moment, the choice to inspire or excite or charm as an action is much more engaging than just getting mad at someone. I still have work to do on this habit, but the nature of this character really helped me make strides.

Walter is a character that I hope to visit again in my career several years from now. Obviously, no professional theatre company in their right mind would cast me as Walter until I really looked forty-something, but it is a role I look forward to being able to do later in life, like George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* or King Lear. Given the opportunity a decade or two from now, there are some changes I would hope to make in my process. For one thing, I would hope to have certain life experiences under my belt that would enrich my understanding of Walter – namely, having kids. I did my best to endow Mason as my son, but a true understanding of the father/son relationship, from the father's perspective, I believe, would be helpful. Also, I would like to go skydiving or parasailing again, or something along those lines before coming back to the role. I parasailed once as a child and enjoyed it, but my memory of it is weak. I am confident in the power of my own imagination, but the experience will amplify my understanding of the flying event, and possibly even the final jump.

There are also other aspects of Walter's history I would research a little more thoroughly. I did not delve too deeply into Walter's relationship to his Army career. My main reason for that was how quickly our rehearsal process started. Research time was limited, and the way Walter treats his military days in the script is often negative. When we started, I felt that was really all the knowledge I needed to establish that value. It was oppressive to him – an obstacle to his dream. I do not believe more research on the subject would change that character value, but it would help create more specific circumstances to drop into my imagination: what the conditions

in Vietnam were really like that he would need to dream about being “up” to get through it, and so on.

Until the next opportunity to play Walter is presented, I will keep this performance as one to be proud of. The open and passionate hearts of all the actors led this production into the stratosphere, and I remain grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it.

Truly, if I didn't ever *have* to come down...

II. WORKS CITED

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