

“Steppin’ Into My Shoes”

By the ReEntry Theatre Program

A play for the radio

Episode 1: Family

Jo Louis: Hello and welcome to “Steppin’ Into My Shoes,” a new radio play created by Civic Ensemble’s ReEntry Theatre Program in collaboration with College Initiative Upstate. This play is based on oral history interviews conducted with people who have experienced incarceration, court involvement, or drug rehabilitation.

Our first episode of this three-part play, Family, will explore what family means in terms of our past experiences and present communities.

One more note to our listeners: some of the stories you’ll hear depict scenes of drug and alcohol use, and domestic violence, and may not be appropriate for all audiences.

Theme Song

Actor 2: I grew up in a house with all generations. My grandparents, my parents, aunts and uncles, siblings and cousins. I was pretty close with all of them. I learned something from each and every one of them. I learned from my grandparents that there is no such thing as loving someone too much. I learned from my parents that perfection doesn’t exist. I learned from my aunts and uncles that family matters. I learned from my cousins, true friendship, and I learned from my siblings how to share. I think it starts with family. I think it starts with having a good grounded support system which I found from my family.

Actor 5: My family, yeah, like I said. I got a large, extended family. I have my dad’s side and my mom’s side. I’ve always been intrigued about every member of my family. Who influenced me the most? I would say probably my grandma. I think my grandmother is the reason I am the way I am, because my grandmother was the focal point on my

father's side of the family. She was the head honcho person. Everybody had to come to her, and I used to be with her all the time. People used to come for help; people used to come for business. I think the way I am about my family is because of that.

I feel like a lot of my family members have influenced me. A lot of people have - my brothers, my aunt. It's weird talking like this because I call my aunt "mom", but she's really my aunt by blood. Her children are my brothers, they have all influenced me a lot in so many different ways. My dad has been there for me too. He wasn't there when I was a little kid. But when I became a teenager, he was there. He taught me how to work on cars and tried to keep me out of trouble, because I was always going in the streets.

Actor 1: I understand you can't go backwards in life. Only forward. But anyways, I have a big family. There are six of us kids. 3 brothers and 2 sisters and I am smack dab in the middle. So, growing up my mother and father didn't have a lot of time for us. There are six of us, like I said, so our parents worked a lot. I ended up pregnant with my son at 16. Oddly, my parents were very supportive at first. But I started drinking with my friends and smoking pot. The problem was I was supposed to be my son's mother. That's why my son went to live with my grandmother. She was able to take him, thank God.

Actor 2: The moment when my first child was born, was when I realized this is what life is about. Everything else before that seemed not as significant. When you have something that you love, like a love you've never felt before, it is mind-blowing -overwhelming with emotion and happiness and content- but then the fear comes and the thought of. "I have no idea what I am doing!" You learn and you grow, and it hits you. Suddenly I felt almost like an adult. I have to keep someone else alive besides myself, every day, forever. It's not just about me anymore. How do I take care of myself while taking care of someone else first? Is there even enough time in the day for both? The answer is so simple yet so complex. Yes, you need to take care of yourself and your child, but you also need to learn balance and throw away the rulebook. You learn to sleep

when the baby sleeps. Eat on the go. Shower with an audience, etc. but don't be a robot. Allow room to be goofy. And be a kid again with your kid. Kids need stability and structure and independence. Today I know that I need all of that. Too.

Transition music plays

Actor 6: We had divorce hanging over our heads the whole time when we were kids and that kind of made it tough to be at home.

My dad basically twice brought my mom to a country where she didn't speak the language and just openly had affairs – to the point that when I was young, she actually tried to kill herself.

Actor 5: My dad raced cars, so when he'd come through for a visit, we would live in his trailer and drive around. And then, when it got too much for us to travel, he would dump me off at my aunt's again.

Actor 6: I would hear yelling at night. My dad was drunk, and he would be yelling at my mom. It was almost a nightly deal. Sometimes it would really scare me and I'd wake up and would try to interrupt it by saying, "Hey, I need help over here." And my dad would stumble in the room drunk. And I'd say, "Oh, I have growing pains," or something. Just trying to distract him from arguing with my mom. That became worse over the years.

I moved out as soon as I could. A few years later, I came to visit and he just started yelling at me. As I was getting into my car to leave my last words to him were, "screw you!" And the next morning I got a phone call from my Uncle Frank who was my dad's brother. I happened to answer the phone, and Uncle Frank told me that my dad had committed suicide.

Actor 4: Yeah, it was rough, man. It was rough having a mom addicted to crack. People knew who I was, people knew who my mom was – we're from here. People knew that

my mom was addicted to crack. It was rough. Money was rough, food was tight, everything was tight. My mom wasn't around a lot. So, my grandmother, bless her soul, actually raised us. It was a really peaceful environment. Until my mom would come back, after she'd been out binging for weeks, or whatever, a long time. Sometimes I didn't see her for maybe, a couple of months. Then she would come back and she'd be exhausted and tired and she'd pretty much just sleep then she'd go back out and hit the streets again. She missed my high school graduation because of all that stuff. Until this day, she still regrets that so much, her first child's high school graduation.

Transition music plays

Actor 5: I think it starts with having family support. From the ones that are closest to you. No matter the rights or wrongs you've done.

Actor 2: My grandfather was a huge part of my life. My parents got divorced when I was two and my father had some addiction issues and just some stuff going on. ...so it was important for me to have my grandfather, my mom's dad. Puffy Jones is his nickname. Puffy, he was a huge inspiration for me. He was the epitome of what I think a family man should be. He was a little on the strict side, but he kind of did it with love. There was a certain way that he expected you to conduct yourself as a human but if you messed up, you knew he didn't like it, but he didn't hold it against you. He was very loving. He was very giving. He took care of his family. I miss him so much.

Actor 7: My grandmother. She moved back here from California. She's awesome. She actually has my daughter right now, so my wife can do her errands and I can be here. She's 50 years older than me and still kicking like...78 years old, man. God Bless her soul.... that, that woman is my everything.

Actor 5: My aunt is just like the most compassionate person out there. If she thinks that there's something she can do to make you more comfortable or more happy, she'll

basically force you to accept the fact that she's going to be doing it. So that has really influenced me in a lot of ways. Like it makes me want to do that for the people that I care about as well. And one of the things that I definitely pride myself on is just being a good friend to the people that I care about and not necessarily inconveniencing myself, but definitely going out of my way to make sure that the people around me are happy and healthy and have things around them that help them succeed in life.

Actor 3: My son is in school. He's in kindergarten right now, still living with my father and step-mother. Um, I'm like slowly still trying to figure it out. I've never been a mom without support of them, because as soon as I got pregnant, I moved back in with them. Um, so I'm like happy that he has them and he's not in the foster care system and everything worked out the way it was supposed to work out, but I'm also trying to, like, I want to be his mom. I want, I want to be the person that takes care of him and this is definitely a work in progress - mostly because I don't trust myself. Um and I'm scared. I don't want to screw him up. Uh, and he's turning into this confident, beautiful little boy staying with my dad and step mom. And I, I, I want to be able to give that to him, but I don't necessarily trust myself - like I don't believe in myself to be able to do that necessarily. And that sucks.

Actor 7: I was born in South Florida, and early in my childhood neither of my parents were around. I remember being bounced around from foster care to foster care. My memories of this are mostly sitting awake at night wondering "why don't my parents want me.?" The ominous, putrid smell of urine that lingered in the dorms. After time passed, the restless nights seemed to reside. One morning to my surprise, my uncle, who was my mother's brother, came to take me home. I enjoyed living with my uncle very much. He is a substance abuse counselor. He would always remind me of the effects drugs and alcohol can have on your life and those around you. As I became a teenager, my mother would visit us from time to time.

Actor 3: Well I grew up in Elmira, NY until I was like 16. And then I moved out to my father's in Tioga, Pennsylvania. So, I guess Tioga was where I came from before I came out here. Yeah, I'm so grateful for him. He changed my life really.

Actor 6: I guess I was just kind of like unhappy and I needed some help, so I started talking to my elders like my aunt, my mom. I called my sister as well and friends like older friends to kind of get their.... maybe to get their advice. I remember talking to my older sister Maddie. She had already been living in Ithaca for a few years. I'm very close to my sister. She knew, she was like "That place, you don't need to be there. Maybe you should come up to Ithaca. I think you'd like it. It's more of a welcoming community. People don't really put each other down as much". Even though people definitely put each other down in Ithaca, but just not as much as I feel like they did in North Texas in that big town where- their politics are different too. So, I think that's important to keep in mind. She was like "Just come up. I'll buy you a ticket."

Actor 7: The moment when you find your calling in life you know when it hits you – It's an unexplainable feeling. It often feels like deja vu or setting goals and looking forward to conquering them. My child gives me the perseverance and strength to succeed in life when all else at times feels difficult. She gives me the courage and determination to keep going too, no matter what unpredictable things life has in store for me. Suddenly, I felt at ease knowing that I am a protector for my child and I am giving her a better life than I once had. It feels good teaching her right from wrong, watching her grow into her own individual personality.

Actor 1: Today I know, no matter what life brings, you can always see the positive in a negative situation. Which gives me clarity to see no matter what's in store, there's always a ray of light at the end of the tunnel.

Music plays

Jo Louis: You've been listening to "Steppin' Into My Shoes" by Civic Ensemble's ReEntry Theatre Program. This week's episode featured the voices of Leroy Barrett, Brian Briggs, Ricardo Escobedo, Amy Heffron, Michael James, Latoya Peterson, and Gabriella da Silva Carr

This play was directed by Gabriella da Silva Carr and Julia Taylor. Our Producer is Julia Taylor. We developed this play in collaboration with College Initiative Upstate, including Benay Rubenstein. Our program intern was Tilda Wilson. Sound was designed by Rudy Gerson and the audio engineer was Nate Richardson of REP Studio. The theme song was created by Jo-Louis Hallback, A.C. Sidle, and Brennen Feint.

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