

COLORADO

BY PETER SINN NACHTRIEB



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

COLORADO — NACHTRIEB



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COLORADO was originally presented Off-Broadway
at the 2004 Summer Play Festival.

The world premiere of COLORADO
was at Impact Theatre in Berkeley, CA.

For Mark, who's survived every play I've written.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Should you be seeking some thematic guidance, here are some options as to what this play might be about:

This is a play about dreams. Everyone in this play has a big dream and big obstacles. They are restless, anxious, bursting at the seams.

This is a play about American Dreams. How much are our goals and ambitions defined by our culture and how much by our hearts?

This is a play about escape. Nobody seems satisfied with their physical and emotional “present.” They’ve all made sanctuaries for themselves, created alternate realities.

This is a play about disappointment. How do we lose our way? How do we find our way back? Do we? And what is it about the suburban landscape that can drive people to desperate acts?

This is a play about the line between comedy and tragedy in our lives. I have always written with a comic and am always curious about the line in the viscera between pain and hilarity.

This is not an autobiographical play.

Nancy Lee Russell, who played Grace in the SPF production, told me she believed the play was about optimism. It’s how she approached the character as an actress. It makes sense. Buried under the layers of muck lie kernels of hope. Everyone is still hoping.

She gave me a pin that says “optimism.” It’s on the wall by my desk.

A showcase production of COLORADO was presented Off-Broadway as part of the Summer Play Festival (Arielle Tepper, Founder; Rachel Neuburger, Executive Director), opening on July 28, 2004. It was directed by Tracy Ward; the set design was by Eliza Brown; the costume design was by Jessica Watters; the lighting design was by Paul Whitaker; and the production stage manager was Ivonne Herrera. The cast was as follows:

TRACEY Emily Young
TRAVIS Rufus Tureen
GRACE Nancy Lee Russell
RON Rick Hickman

COLORADO received its world premiere at Impact Theatre (Melissa Hillman, Artistic Director) in Berkeley, California, opening on September 22, 2006. It was directed by Elkhanah Pulitzer; the set design was by Andrew Susskind; the costume design was by Courtney Flores; the lighting design was by Jacqueline Steager; the sound design was by Matt Payne; and the production stage manager was Richard Levasseur. The cast was as follows:

TRACEY Adrienne Papp
TRAVIS Joshua Huston
GRACE Klahr Thorsen
RON Jon Nagel

CHARACTERS

TRACEY — 17, Miss Late Teen Colorado

TRAVIS — 14, her brother

GRACE — 40s, her mother

RON — 40s, her father

PLACE

Colorado. A suburb.

TIME

The present.

COLORADO

ACT ONE

The stage is dark. Cheering and triumphant music fade up in the darkness.

Tracey appears in front of a microphone drenched in a warm pool of light as the cheers swell. She's in a pageant gown, wearing a tiara, a sash across her front reads "Miss Late Teen Colorado." She's waving. She's crying. Flowers are thrown at her from all directions.

TRACEY. Thank you! Thank you all! Thank you so so so so much! Oh I love you so so, so so so much. Thank you! (*Tracey signals the crowd to calm down. The cheering dies down.*) This ... This is the happiest day of my life! (*Cheers.*) I ... I am so enchanted to receive this beautiful, glorious, magical, glistening crown, am so proud to be your Miss Late Teen Colorado, and am so thrilled to represent our great state in Virginia Beach this summer! (*Cheers.*) I couldn't have done this without some very wonderful people who have helped me with my polished beauty and brilliance: My beauty trainer, my mentor, my spirit guide Stan: You never gave up on me, because you didn't have to. My friends: Tammy, Tanya, Lorraine, Melinda, Cassie, Jen, Jennifer, Jen, Jennifer, Jenny, Jenna, Sandra, Sasha, Emilys K, V, B, and W, and Maxine, or "Maxi Pads" as we call her, sorry Maxine, or should I say Maxi Pads, ha ha ha, Toni, Bobbi, the entire horse species, and finally, my ex-boyfriend Chet, who showed me what it means to truly love in a physical way.

And, like most importantly, there is no way in the entire planetary globe I would be here if it weren't for the bottomless river of undying support from my loving family.

Mom, (*Grace appears in a pool of light, watching Tracey adoringly.*)

Dad, *(Ron appears in a pool of light, also watching Tracey with pride.)* I love you so so so so so much! Travis, my brother. *(Travis appears in a pool, watches Tracey, a little bewildered.)* Not really.

I ... I would like to dedicate this Late Teen crown to all the contestants who couldn't be here tonight: Miss Lakewood, Miss Federal Heights, and Miss Castle Rock, who couldn't compete because of the horrible, tragic events that have taken place at their schools. We wish you all a speedy recovery, this crown is for you. *(Cheers.)* I WANT TO USE THIS CROWN TO CHANGE THE WORLD! If I can just change one life, one little insignificant life, I think it will justify the beauty that God has given me.

Thank you all! Thank you for loving me so much! *(Tracey waves as cheers rise, the music rises and ... Abruptly, the music and cheers fade. Lights brighten on Grace, Ron, and Travis. Spare music underscores.)*

GRACE. Such a glorious day.

RON. Wonderful.

GRACE. Everyone cheering and clapping.

RON. She shined so brightly.

GRACE. Everything came together.

RON. Like a constellation. She was celestial.

TRAVIS. My sister stole my cat.

GRACE. That dress never fit so perfectly as it did that night.

RON. Her rendition of "The Rose" was pitch-perfect.

TRAVIS. Captain ChopChop. He was neutered.

GRACE. I've never cried for so long. Not from happiness.

RON. I couldn't stop thinking, "That's half me. I'm half responsible for that."

TRAVIS. I told Captain ChopChop everything. Secrets. Some of them inappropriate.

GRACE. That was a happy moment. The happiest.

RON. I think I know how Seabiscuit felt.

TRAVIS. But then, my sister started giving Captain ChopChop milk. Tender Vittles. Extra-long sponge baths. She locked him in her room. She only let him out for walks after my bedtime. She changed his name to Pussy Timberlake. "Pussy" didn't even purr at me anymore.

I wanted so badly to walk into her room, pick up my cat, MY cat, and take him back. *(Tracey's light slowly fades.)*

GRACE. That was two weeks ago. Two weeks and eight hundred years.

RON. So strange when everything can turn so suddenly.

TRAVIS. But then, yesterday ...

GRACE. I was having my quarterly facial across town. Tracey ... She said she was fine with walking to beauty practice. Her final run-through before the national competition.

RON. We were going to have a big send-off party last night. A cookout. All meat and no carbs. She insisted. I brought the special ground round from the meat plant I work at.

TRAVIS. Yesterday my sister disappeared.

GRACE. Stan called the spa, saying Tracey hadn't shown up. I almost fainted. She's never been late for beauty practice.

RON. I was adding coals to the grill. My wife came through the patio door. Her facial was only half done.

TRAVIS. They told me to watch TV.

GRACE. I called the police. The news stations. Everyone.

RON. I maintained the coals. The patties were right by the grill just in case. We stayed up all night.

TRAVIS. It was on the news this morning at school. People talked to me for the first time: teachers, seniors, even jocks ...

GRACE. The police came first thing. I couldn't stop hugging them.

RON. They stayed all day. Dusting for prints, checking everywhere, asking a lot of questions. Getting the facts. I offered them burgers. Maybe they're all vegetarians.

TRAVIS. They said I couldn't go into her room. There was a yellow piece of tape across the door. But I did. I went inside. I think Captain ChopChop ran away.

GRACE. They're searching now. Just wait, they said.

RON. Leave it to the professionals, they said.

TRAVIS. Where do cats go when they run away?

GRACE. They will find her. They were very confident.

RON. Hopefully something will turn up.

TRAVIS. Maybe he'll come running through the patio door. *(Music stops. Lights come up full on the living room of the Ackhart family, where Ron, Grace and Travis now stand. They wait. Heightened silence. The phone rings loudly.)*

GRACE. Ah! *(Ron and Grace go to answer. Ron wins.)*

RON. Yes hello is there any ... The *National* who? No, I haven't. Well, my wife does more of the shopping so maybe she's seen ... No. How did you get this ... NO, we will not. Please! We are extremely stricken right now. Please just leave us alone. And tell all

your other reporters that too! Good night. (*Ron hangs up.*) He wanted us to subscribe.

GRACE. Pull it out.

RON. What?

GRACE. The phone.

RON. But what if ...

GRACE. The police said they'd come in person. I can't stand any more ringing today. (*Ron unplugs the phone.*)

RON. There. It's quiet.

GRACE. Good.

RON. Very quiet. (*Pause.*)

TRAVIS. Is there anything I can do?

GRACE. Like what?

TRAVIS. Get something? Make the bed? I can cook dinner.

GRACE. How are you thinking about food?

TRAVIS. I just want to do something to —

GRACE. Help? OK. Why don't you tell us where Tracey is?

TRAVIS. But ... I don't know ...

GRACE. Well, then there's not much you can "do" then.

TRAVIS. Sorry, I was ...

GRACE. I know. I know.

RON. You can still make the beds if you want, Travis.

TRAVIS. I just ... (*The doorbell rings.*)

RON. Should I get it?

GRACE. No. It might be someone important. (*Grace runs to the door.*)

TRAVIS. The cops?

RON. I don't know.

TRAVIS. They just left.

RON. Maybe they forgot a wallet.

TRAVIS. I don't like cops.

RON. The police protect our way of life, Travis. There's no reason to be afraid of them, unless you're on drugs. You're not taking drugs?

TRAVIS. Just the Ritalin.

RON. That doesn't count. You have a note for that. It's more like if you shot heroin, if you were a junkie. Are you a junkie?

TRAVIS. No.

RON. Then the police are on your side. (*Grace enters holding a pie.*)

GRACE. It's a pie.

RON. The police gave us —

GRACE. Jeannie Henderson. She just handed it to me, tried to speak, and then ran away.

RON. She wrote a note.

GRACE. What does it say?

RON. "Wishing you the best in this time of tragedy. I really hope ..."

And then there's just a pen trail here, and it's stained.

GRACE. That was very nice of her. A nice gesture.

RON. A gesture. That's all she can do. It does nothing to ...

GRACE. Shhhhh.

RON. I'm just saying ...

GRACE. No "just saying." I don't want to hear it.

RON. Fine. (*Pause.*) Are you going to put the pie down?

GRACE. No.

RON. Honey ...

GRACE. All right! (*Grace puts the pie down on a table.*)

RON. I'll get some plates.

TRAVIS. I can get them.

GRACE. No plates!

RON. It seems a little runny for napkins.

GRACE. We don't eat this.

RON. Darling, the pie is warm ...

GRACE. We save it for when she comes back.

RON. That might not ...

GRACE. Shush!

RON. Jeannie wanted us to eat this ...

GRACE. No, she did not! This is a token of support, not food. We need to keep this, as a symbol that we can always look at.

RON. Your life sucks, so here's a pie.

GRACE. That's crude.

RON. I get cranky when I'm hungry.

TRAVIS. Dad, you could make a hamburger. I could go out and —

RON. Go to your room, Travis.

TRAVIS. I'm just trying to —

RON. Your room! Or watch TV! Watch whatever, Ann Landers, or whatever your favorite show is.

TRAVIS. His name is Maury Povich. I have to go to the bathroom. (*Travis exits.*)

RON. We're being unkind.

GRACE. I know.

RON. Are you OK?

GRACE. I don't know.

RON. Right.

GRACE. Let's just try to have a calm night. Can we try that?

RON. Sure. *(Grace takes Ron's hands.)*

GRACE. And, can we please ... *(Pause.)*

RON. Fine. We'll keep the pie.

GRACE. Thank you. Thank you ...

I'll go make you a hamburger. *(The doorbell rings. Grace runs to the door. Ron stays fixed on the pie. His arm slowly starts to reach over towards it. Before he touches it, Grace enters with another pie.)*

RON. Who was it?

GRACE. I don't know. It's pecan. *(Lights fade out on the living room, and rise on Travis, in the bathroom.)*

TRAVIS. I don't just watch the television.

I go into the den, I turn the TV on loud, put it on *Maury Povich*, and I touch parts of my body. My ankles, feet, legs, elbows, ears, and other places I will not mention out loud.

I've been doing it a lot. Everything feels so ... funky when I do the touching. There's this strange, tingly shiver in my head, my spine, my unmentionables. Sometimes, I tingle and I don't even have to touch anything! It starts on its own: when I'm thinking about computers or N'Sync, when I ride my bike, or when Kirk Anghoff, captain of the freshman volleyball team, gives me a wedgie.

But, it's best when I do it with him. I lie in front of the TV, on my back, I remove my clothes, I hear Maury's voice, I watch the guests, I shut my eyes, I play with my knees, my chest, my things that dangle, and I feel so weird and strangely focused, and I feel like I'm going to have the world's most wonderful headache or scream or explode ... But then, my sister pops in my head and says ... *(Lights shift to reveal Tracey standing near her brother. She's putting makeup on in front of a bathroom mirror.)*

TRACEY. Ew.

TRAVIS. I don't think my sister liked me very much. I remember one time when she said:

TRACEY. You know, Travis, I don't like you very much.

TRAVIS. But ...

TRACEY. No! Don't speak. Your voice will make me break out. I am trying to create stunning beauty here.

TRAVIS. But ...

TRACEY. Nnnnnnnnn! Are you deaf? God! You're like an annoying Helen Keller. This is really important, it's my final pre-Miss Late Teen Colorado Pageant beauty-through with Stan tonight.

TRAVIS. What's a beauty-through?

TRACEY. What's an annoying piece of turd doing in a little brother costume? Now leave. I need to get in the zone.

TRAVIS. But ...

TRACEY. Out!

TRAVIS. I have to pee. *(Pause.)*

TRACEY. Ew. You just said pee.

TRAVIS. I have to go really bad.

TRACEY. Do you want a medal?

TRAVIS. No. I want to use the toilet.

TRACEY. Ew! You just said toilet.

TRAVIS. Really bad.

TRACEY. Well, I'm sorry, this bathroom is taken.

TRAVIS. Can't you take a break?

TRACEY. Why don't you take a break from your needing to pee?

TRAVIS. You can't just not gotta go ...

TRACEY. Did Michelangelo take a break from carving the "David" so his little twerp brother could carve a sink? *(Pause.)*

TRAVIS. What?

TRACEY. No! He did not! Art cannot wait, Travis, it can't! Genius doesn't have a pause button. Why don't you go pee on a tree?

TRAVIS. I get shy at trees. It doesn't come out. I just need to —

TRACEY. JESUS! Do you see your pathetic pleas affecting me in any way whatsoever? Go in a cup in your room, I don't care! Whisssssssss.

Travis has to pee-eeeeee. Whisssssssssss. Drip drip waterfalls rushing flowing big droplets dam bursting flow it out!

TRAVIS. Stop!

TRACEY. Get out and I'll stop.

TRAVIS. I'm on the verge! I gotta —

TRACEY. The only way you're going to get me out of this bathroom before I am beautiful is if you kill me. Are you going to kill me, Travis?

TRAVIS. *(Scared.)* N ... No!

TRACEY. You sure you don't want to stab me, bludgeon me, smother me with a pillow? You wanna do it!

TRAVIS. No! Of course not! I ...

TRACEY. You what? You love me?

TRAVIS. I ... I ...

TRACEY. Oh ... You love your sister. You love your Tracey. Kiss me Travis. Kiss your sister's lips.

TRAVIS. (*Almost crying.*) I —

TRACEY. Jesus! TALK! WHAT?

TRAVIS. I just peed. (*Lights fade out on the bathroom and up on the living room. An hour later. There are now eight pies on the table. Grace walks in with a framed 8 x 10 photograph of Tracey. She begins to arrange the pies around the photo.*)

GRACE. You love rhubarb. Here. Smell it. (*Grace pushes the rhubarb pie closer to the picture.*) When you come back, it's going to be right here for you. Waiting for you to smell and not eat. (*Ron enters wearing a coat and holding a self-help book, which he tries to hide from Grace.*)

RON. I'm going out. I'm getting some lotto tickets. I guess I'll go through the back so all those news —

GRACE. What do you think?

RON. About ... (*Seeing the photo in the middle of the pies.*) Oh.

GRACE. It feels so powerful to see this. Her. In the middle of all this ... all this baking. I could buy some flowers, use our tinsel, place it around. Bring some of her favorite things down: her modeling portfolio, her pageant shoes, her Nair ... She's surrounded by her favorite things, by the support of the community.

RON. You think now that there's so many pies we might be able to —

GRACE. We are not having that discussion again.

RON. Right. I'm going for a ...

GRACE. You didn't tell me what you think of my idea.

RON. I didn't?

GRACE. No.

RON. You sure? I thought I said ...

GRACE. You're avoiding.

RON. I think it's a wonderful idea. I'm going out.

GRACE. You're lying.

RON. No. I'm not. This is really nice what you're doing here. And the plans with her things and the tinsel; it'll be a nice monument.

GRACE. Vigil.

RON. It's really nice, Grace.

GRACE. Not often you give me a compliment.

RON. Well, I just did.

GRACE. Thank you.

RON. You're welcome. I'm going out.
GRACE. What should be the first thing we do when she gets back?
RON. Um. How about we go out to a fancy restaurant?
GRACE. Don't be funny. You know how Tracey hates dinner.
RON. Right. What about ... ice skating?
GRACE. The cold wrecks her skin. Stan would throw a fit.
RON. OK. How about we sit on the couch and write down all the things that make us glad we have each other.
GRACE. Is that some project idea from that book?
RON. Yes.
GRACE. *Feelings, Men, and How to Bridge the Gap?*
RON. Yes.
GRACE. That's really not a celebration now, is it?
RON. Fine. Let's just go to the mall. Tracey can buy all the "wonder" brassieres she wants. (*Grace thinks.*)
GRACE. The Reagan Galleria is her favorite.
RON. I was kidding.
GRACE. I don't understand.
RON. I was being sarcastic.
GRACE. About the mall?
RON. Oh, Christ. Why can't we ...
GRACE. Why can't we what?
RON. Never mind. It's just ... Well, I don't really like buying those push-up things for our daughter. I don't like making her look "sexy."
GRACE. She has bosoms, Ron. She needs support.
RON. She was just a girl.
GRACE. She is a woman.
RON. Why did we let her do those competitions?
GRACE. What are you talking about?
RON. All that exposure. All those people watching.
GRACE. It was her dream.
RON. You pushed her.
GRACE. Are you accusing me of being a bad mother?
RON. No. I'm just saying maybe you let her go too far.
GRACE. Me?
RON. I never wanted this.
GRACE. Yes you did.
RON. No I ...
GRACE. The night she won, you hugged our daughter, laughed and yelled, "God, I really wanted this!"

RON. The heat of the moment.

GRACE. She deserved to be there. To win.

RON. I know.

GRACE. It was an amazing night.

RON. I know.

GRACE. How could you not want that night?

RON. If she wasn't in those competitions, if she'd not been on TV that night, she might ...

GRACE. Why don't you just accuse me of kidnapping her?

RON. That's not what I —

GRACE. Some evil creature has snatched our Tracey and you have the gall to accuse your —

RON. We don't know what has happened to her.

GRACE. You think she just ran away right before her big day?

RON. Maybe. Or maybe she's —

GRACE. She is coming back!

I don't remember the Ron I married back in college being so dark, so cruel, spreading this vicious, cynical jam you're spreading on me right now like I'm some muffin!

RON. I'm not vicious. I'm just a little stressed.

GRACE. You've been stressed your whole life.

RON. I'm tired.

GRACE. That's not it.

RON. You don't understand my sense of humor.

GRACE. That's not it.

RON. I dislike you. *(Pause.)*

GRACE. What?

RON. Oh Christ. I'm going out.

GRACE. You what?

RON. I didn't mean it. I'm going crazy. I'm going out.

GRACE. Do you ... Do you ...

RON. It just came out! It was a joke! I have Tourette's. I'm buying some lotto tickets! I'm going out! *(Ron exits through the back.)*

GRACE. Ronald! *(Grace pulls some tinsel from her pocket. She attempts to decorate. She throws a piece of tinsel down and lets out a yell. Looking at Tracey's photo.)* If you were here, I wouldn't have to listen to him. If you were here, I could blow him off. If you were here, I could drive you to your pageant lessons and make sweet sweet love to your trainer, Stan Capshaw, while you do your warm-ups and cardio.

Why do good times end? Where are you, Tracey? I need you. You're the only person I can talk to. *(Crossfade to a car, Tracey in front, Travis in the back. Grace enters the car as she speaks.)*

TRACEY. Mother, I'm the only person in the world you can talk to.

GRACE. That's so true, honey.

TRACEY. I know you had dreams I'm on the cusp of realizing. You wanted to be beautiful. Be an actress. Go to Hollywood. We're so similar in a limited way.

GRACE. Oh honey! It really is as though we're not just mother and daughter, we're great friends. Best friends.

TRAVIS. Can we get some ice cream?

GRACE and TRACEY. No!

TRACEY. I'm late for beauty practice!

GRACE. Stan gets very angry if Tracey misses her warm-ups and cardio.

TRACEY. It's like the most important part. Stan never lets me skip that. And all you think about is ice cream. Jesus!

GRACE. It's OK, honey.

TRACEY. I work really hard to be pert and I hate it when people get in the way.

GRACE. I know. I know.

TRAVIS. Can I walk to the 7-11 and get some ice cream later?

GRACE and TRACEY. No!

GRACE. You've had enough sweets for the week, with that zucchini bread you had last night.

TRACEY. My skin gets oily even when I get near dairy. And you know, Travis, that too much lactose makes you lose bladder control.

TRAVIS. Shut up!

GRACE. Travis! You watch your mouth or no more fun rides in the car.

TRACEY. Yeah, Travis, I was just telling you some important health factoids. Trying to save Mom a few loads of wet pants in the wash. Stan has told me so many horror stories about nutrition.

GRACE. Stan is such an amazing mentor. I'm so glad we found him.

TRACEY. I think he has a crush on me.

GRACE. What?

TRACEY. Sometimes, when I'm practicing my evening gown promenades, my turns, my Qs and As, I see Stan just sitting there and smiling at me. And not a mentor-like smile. It totally feels like he's kissing me, mentally.

GRACE. Oh no no. I think he's just very proud of you. Like we're all very proud of you. You're his most successful student.

TRACEY. He's in love with me.

GRACE. Well, I'm sure he "loves" you, but not like ...

TRACEY. He'd fuck me if it was legal.

GRACE. Tracey! Use whatever words you want at school but not in front of your mother and your little brother!

TRAVIS. I wasn't paying attention.

TRACEY. Sorry! Jesus. Don't throw a hissy.

GRACE. To even think that Stan would want to ... It's wrong to think of a grown-up like that. Your teacher. And then, to cuss!

TRACEY. "Grown-up"? I'm not in kindergarten. I am seventeen years old, mother. My body and mind are fully matured.

GRACE. I know, but ...

TRACEY. And if it was England it would totally be OK.

GRACE. There's a reason we revolted from them, Tracey. I don't want to hear anymore.

TRACEY. I was just treating you like my best friend, Mother.

GRACE. Oh.

TRACEY. I thought it's what you wanted.

GRACE. Oh it is!

TRACEY. I want to be totally honest with you. Woman to woman. In my field, with the beauty that I have, there is going to be a lot of advances from all kinds of people. A lot of difficult, intimate things happening to me. I want to share those with you, Mother. Be my confidante. Live through me. Can we have that special bond? Can you love me and not be jealous of all the potential I have?

GRACE. Oh, I do want to be that confidante. You're getting so mature. So "grown-up." I guess it's going to take me some time to adjust. You're so special.

But, promise me to stop getting strange ideas in your head about Stan. I know you're mature. I trust you. But ... it would look weird in the pageants. It might put your whole career in jeopardy.

TRACEY. I would never do anything to threaten my career!

GRACE. You're so committed. You get that from your father.

TRACEY. I promise, Mother. I have been given a gift, and I will open it. I'm not going to let this opportunity pass me by. I won't make the same mistakes you made.

GRACE. No. Don't. *(Pause.)*

TRAVIS. What mistakes did you make, Mom?

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