

TELLIN' TALES THEATRE PRESENTS

Diversity

Forging deep connections through story

Virtual solo performances by
writers, actors & advocates
with disabilities



BRIAN HEYBURN



BRIANNE COLEMAN



NATE WOOGEN



MICHELE LEE



JACK GEHRINGER



MOLLY WIESMAN



WHITNEY HILL



BEN SAYLOR



TERRI THROWER



Directed By Tekki Lomnicki
Video Production by Lizzy Brahin
Graphics by Pete Benitez of Flight Byte Design

THE CAST

BRIAN HEYBURN (he/him/his) is a Ph.D. Candidate in Disability Studies at UIC. His research is focused on the ways in which politicized writers with Cerebral Palsy write specifically about identity, embodiment, and resistance. In his spare time, dabbles in various forms of art making, usually photography or writing, focusing on lived experiences at the intersections of disability and queerness. He has participated in one previous Tellin' Tales production of Diversity.

BRIANNE COLEMAN is a well-versed administrative professional with a deep passion for change. As a survivor of childhood trauma, sexual assault, and domestic violence, she tirelessly advocates for victims/survivors through her public speaking, peer support and volunteer work. Brianne is a 2020 graduate of the ADA 25 Advancing Leadership program and is now a member of that prestigious network of disability leaders. In addition, Brianne recently began her fellowship with the Illinois Coalition Against Domestic Violence Leadership Academy Brianne founded Dimensions of Intersections, an upcoming nonprofit with a mission to stop the cycle of domestic violence.

NATE WOOGAN is a Chicago-based stand-up comedian, writer, and improviser. He has completed the Writing and Improv programs at the Second City Training Center. This is his second time at the Tellin' Tales Storytelling workshop. In his free time, he enjoys finding and watching obscure horror movies.

MICHELE LEE is a power wheelchair user after a motor vehicle accident. She lives in downtown Chicago and is a disability activist and advocate. She currently works in Finance and is passionate about accessibility and inclusion.

JACK GEHRINGER has Bachelors in Social Work from Northeastern Illinois University. He made his debut performance in 2003 in *Six Stories Up in Pediatrics*. He returned to the Six Stories up stage in 2006 starring as the evil side of George Bush's conscience in *Six Stories Up in the Ozone*. After middle school he got involved in the young adult writing workshop and readers theater performances. In 2016, Jack made his debut appearance, as a mentor, in *Six Stories Up in Climate Change* in 2018. Whether on stage or in the audience, he continues to be an avid supporter of Tellin Tales Theatre.

MOLLY WIESMAN has been involved with Tellin' Tales Theatre for 20 the last years. She is currently a member of the Board of Directors as well as serving on the marketing committee. She has appeared in the Six Stories Up Production three times, once as a mentor. She has also appeared in *Diversity* and *Freedom: Out of Order*, done in conjunction with the Lyric Opera of Chicago. She participated in the Tellin' Tales Young Adult Workshop several times, including leading it once. Wiesman has been involved with a variety of disability organizations such as Easter Seals DuPage and JJ's List. She is a proud ambassador for Best Buddies International. She was selected as an ADA 25 Leadership Fellow in 2019. Molly is honored to be a member of the Tellin' Tales Ensemble.

WHITNEY HILL is a specialist on accessibility with over a decade of experience in program management and communication. Her background in universal design and public accessibility combined with her personal background of identifying as someone with a disability give her a unique skillset to connect individuals with needed services, while also empowering them to advocate for themselves. Throughout her career, Whitney has aimed to ensure that public and institutional spaces are made readily accessible. She is also the founder and director of SPORK!, a 501 (c) 3 Nonprofit and online platform that serves as a voice for the disabled community.

BEN SAYLOR has been with Tellin' Tales Theater since 2005 when he was 11 years old. In *Six stories Up on Capitol Hill*, he was an apprentice. Since then he has been with Tellin' Tales as an apprentice, student assistant director, and a mentor. He appeared in Porchlight Musical Theater's production of *Side Show* as the Littlest Cossack. Ben graduated from DePaul University with a BA in Relational Communications and double minored in LGBTQ Studies and Creative Writing. He now works in the compliance department for Avant LLC and is the Co-Leader and Co-founder of LPA's Rainbow Committee, focusing on providing resources and acceptance for LGBTQAI+ little people within the organization.

TERRI THROWER is a Tellin' Tales veteran, beginning with her first solo performance in 2009. Terri is a disability culture activist and scholar, with a Ph.D. in Disability Studies from UIC. She is currently working on her memoir, and lives in the mountains of north Georgia with her husband of 27 years.

TEKKI LOMNICKI (Director) is the founder and Artistic Director of Tellin' Tales Theatre, a 25-year old company dedicated to shattering the barriers between the disabled and non-disabled worlds through the power of personal story. Tekki's two full-length plays *When Heck Was a Puppy: The Living Testimonies of Folk Artist Edna Mae Brice* and *Blurred Vision* were critically acclaimed by The Chicago Reader and The Chicago Sun Times. She has written and performed over 26 solo performance pieces, and starred in the award-winning film, *The Miracle* by Jeffrey Jon Smith. She taught youth at Chicago's Gallery 37 and After School Matters, and adults at the Victory Gardens Training Center, and ADA 25 Advancing Leadership. She is a recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Artists Fellowship in New Performance Forms, the 2008 3Arts Award in Theater, the 2010 Grigsby Award for Excellence in Solo Performance, the 2014 Dan Van Hecke Award for outstanding leadership and service to the disability community and was named a 2016 Duke of Distinction at York Community High School in Elmhurst. Tekki is on the Inclusion & Diversity Council at True Value Company and does disability awareness presentations for corporations. She is currently working on a new full-length musical spotlighting the disability experience.

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UPCOMING 2021 SHOWS

GENETIC KARMA: BECOMING OUR PARENTS—July 9-18

Seasoned solo performers and Live Lit writers give us a glimpse into the DNA of how we take traits of our parents—good and bad— and run with them.

TEEN TALES—June 26-27

A group of talented teens with and without disabilities create a full play based on themes taken from their everyday lives.

YOUNG ADULT WRITERS READER'S THEATRE—July 24-25

Writers, college age and beyond, with and without disabilities share stories in a virtual Reader's Theater presentation.

MIDDLE SCHOOL VOICES READER'S THEATRE—August 18-25

Middle school writers with and without disabilities share stories in a virtual Reader's Theater presentation.

HANDS UP! GENDER—October 23-24

Liberating? Binding? Non-existent? A diverse cast of writers and performers explore questions about gender.

SIX STORIES UP IN DEFIANCE—November 5-14

Middle school students and their adult mentors with and without disabilities explore defying the odds in their own lives alongside the historical figures that made a mark in society.

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