

BURIED: THE SAGO MINE DISASTER

by

Jerry Starr

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Preface

My grandfather, Abe Martin, married my grandmother, Sarah Diamond, in Pittsburgh in 1903. She was the first of the Diamond family to leave Russia. Abe was a peddler who saved up enough money to open a general store in a mining town in the region. Duncanwood, Ohio was a short drive from Wheeling, West Virginia where my mother and her eleven brothers and sisters were born. Only six survived early childhood. In that town there was a company store, run by the Blue Diamond Mine Company, and a “Jew store,” owned and operated by my grandparents.

As my mother, Roberta, recalled, it was a big dry goods store with produce and even its own butcher. Duncanwood was a tiny little hollow, but folks came from miles around to buy there. My family attended the local church on Sunday because they had no place of worship of their own. Privately, they continued to identify with the Jewish tradition.

The rest of the Diamonds emigrated from Russia to Sharon, Pennsylvania in 1909. They consisted of Sarah’s parents, Harry and Molly, two sisters, Rebecca and Ida, and a brother, Meyer. Around 1924, Ida married Joe Chafetz and he led the Pennsylvania family to Detroit, then a burgeoning factory town within a long day’s drive.

In 1931, the mine workers struck. The company decided that it would be cheaper for them to shut down and move on than to grant any concessions to their workers. The miners’ families asked my grandparents for credit to get through. My grandparents fed the community until, as my mother put it, their own family was reduced to “eating potatoes to survive.” At this point, the Martins moved to Detroit to join the rest of the Diamonds.

My mother was just entering high school when the family moved. She said the kids teased her about her accent—calling her a hillbilly—but being blond, athletic and pretty, she soon became popular. My great grandparents and grandparents all died within a few years of each other from the late 1930s to 1941, just months before I was born. The only ones I ever got to know from that generation were Ida and Joe who served as surrogate parents for the extended family.

At the age of 20 (already an orphan), my mother married a musician named Nathan Starr and, three years later, I was born. They named me Jerold in memory of my dad’s father Joseph, recently deceased. Detroit was the only home I knew growing up. My connections to Appalachia were just the stuff of family lore.

In 1954, when I was 13, we took a motor trip to the area, vainly searching for familiar signs. An older local referred to it as “old Duncanwood” (even though there was not a new one) and said that it died during the Depression. The only recognizable relic was what was left of the old coal tipple—“There’s the tipple,” my mother shouted upon spotting it.

My cousin, Rick Martin, says there is a picture of the original town in an area museum, but I have never seen it. Other than that, my only sense of this past was my mother’s particular interest in the occasional press accounts of trapped or killed miners. She would cluck and sigh and get a far away look in her eye, but it was a world beyond my knowing.

I was graduated from Mumford High School in 1959 and Monteith College of Wayne State University in 1964. Just after finishing school, I had the good sense to marry Judy Eisele, a beautiful Irish-German Catholic English major. At first a teacher and then a social worker, she has given me two fine sons and stayed by my side for more than 40 years.

In college, I was an honor student and community activist and my Monteith faculty steered me to the Ph.D. Program in Sociology at Brandeis University. I was recruited by then chair Morrie Schwartz (of *Tuesdays with Morrie*) and served as his Teaching Assistant for a time. Phil Slater was my most influential mentor, Gordie Fellman my most supportive advisor. In 1969, I moved to the Sociology faculty of the University of Pennsylvania, a prestigious appointment for a kid from the Midwest.

Still, as grandpa Abe already had learned, no man is safe from hard times. I became one of hundreds of young faculty denied tenure during the academic recession of the mid-1970s. By a strange set of circumstances I found myself back in West Virginia; joining the West Virginia University (WVU) Sociology Department as a Visiting Associate Professor, the next year made permanent, with tenure in a few years and Full Professor soon after. I didn't resign from WVU until 2002, literally days after my mother's death moved me to devote the rest of my life to public service.

Over 1976-7, Morgantown, West Virginia—the home of WVU—was a community in turmoil. The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) had declared a general strike and the state economy threatened to come to a halt. The university administration began issuing periodic statements about whether and when it would have to shut us down.

Two things shocked me. First, the local media—headed by the Morgantown *Dominion Post*—did little or no investigative reporting or critical analysis of the issues. Since it was owned by a conservative Republican ideologue—John Raese—perhaps that was best. But how strange it was to read about what was happening around us through Associated Press wire dispatches.

Second, the university acted like a helpless bystander, rather than a community resource. Even with its own operation at stake, it did not offer its auspices and faculty resources for public education or industry mediation. A handful of faculty took action. My colleague, Joe Simoni, and others organized a relief effort, collecting and distributing food and clothing to the strikers.

I networked with faculty around the university, bringing together those sufficiently concerned about the problem to try to become part of the solution—guys like Ron Althouse, Keith Dix, John Maxwell, and John Randolph. I called us the Committee on Appalachian Labor (COAL) and we made it our purpose to disseminate facts and opinions that might provide perspective on the crisis.

For a while, I had visions of connecting with scholars in other regional institutions to create a virtual think tank on the subject. That proved to be too ambitious for a new faculty member with a wife in graduate school and two small boys. However, we did some good. When President Carter threatened to break the strike by declaring a national emergency, we conducted a well attended press conference in support of the miners' very reasonable demands—principally decent health care.

We held events—like a showing of the film *Harlan County* followed by general discussion. I also wrote editorials for the campus paper. In short, we provided a needed other voice to counter claims that lazy and overpaid miners were only trying to get ahead at the expense of the rest of us; a too commonly heard opinion in a middle class college town.

That experience soon established me as one of very few faculty willing to do public education on social issues and I continued to play that role over the many years following. Among other things, I organized several public forums on peace and human rights issues, advised student groups on speaker and film programs, gave public lectures and wrote editorials.

When the Sago Mine disaster hit the papers, I was teaching a course in the Communication Department of the University of California at San Diego; my regular winter assignment. I also, by now, had racked up several years of experience in the theatre—a long held personal passion. I had studied acting for five years, appeared in several plays, served on the board of a local theatre and produced my first theatre of social justice 3-day fundraiser for the Center for Constitutional Rights—*Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom*.

I knew the history and people of the region. I knew the issues and I cared. It seemed like a natural. I researched the play as I had materials for my social commentary books and articles; reading widely in the literature and excerpting statements from an exhaustive review of press accounts and transcripts of TV interviews and public hearings. Then, with the consultation of generous playwrights, actors and directors in my acquaintance, I spent months creating characters and editing statements into a dramatic structure that would tell the story most effectively.

Buried may be considered part docudrama, part historical play. The scenes in the piece follow the sequence of events as they transpired. The words spoken by public actors in public settings are accurate (albeit edited) as quoted in hearing transcriptions and the mainstream media. Even the dialogue of the miners' wives and daughters at the church or in the café is based on actual statements made to the press and at hearings, embellished by what miners' wives typically say about their lives according to published research.

The narrator (Joe), BBC reporter (Reggie) and proprietor of the Mountaineer Café (Buck) are fictional. They are grounded in my personal knowledge of such people over the 26 years that I lived and worked in West Virginia. And, of course, they serve as vehicles for my interpretation of the action. There are harsh truths revealed in this play. And, while my sympathies are with the victims, I have not knowingly distorted any facts. When the play was completed, I approached my friend Anne Feeney—the renowned labor songwriter/singer—who wrote and arranged the music.

Buried is in the “theatre of social justice” tradition which flourished in the 1930s and 1960s and is experiencing a major renaissance today. Some of the well known plays in this genre include Peter Weiss' *In the Matter of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, Aaron Sorkin's *A Few Good Men*, Anna Devereaux Smith's *Fires in the Mirror*, Moises Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*, Jessica Blank and Eric Jensen's *The Exonerated*, Joan Holden's *Nickel and Dimed*, Emily Mann's *A Requiem*, also *Execution of Justice*, Victoria Brittain's and Gillian Slovo's *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Justice*, and *My Name is Rachel Corrie*. All of these plays try to maintain journalistic truth without compromising the theatrical power of the story.

Buried premiered as a stage reading at Pittsburgh Playwrights, December 6, 2006. About half the cast were equity. The house was full and the audience, including several UMWA officials, enthusiastic. After, Pittsburgh *Post-Gazette* theatre critic Chris Rawson wrote: “The evening taught me a lot. I even found myself reading today's *Post-Gazette* reports about possible developments in mine safety regulations with more understanding. So, I imagine 'Buried' has a useful future as a way of raising community consciousness. Maybe we can get some better laws passed.”

In 2007, *Buried* was chosen by the 6th@Penn Theatre in San Diego for its 2008 “Resilience of the Human Spirit Festival.” Again, about half the cast were equity. It closed the last four days of the event, August 9-12, 2007, as a staged reading. There were full houses for all four performances. The audiences were appreciative and many people stayed after to discuss the play and the issues.

The reviews were excellent. Critic Q. Kish (*San Diego Theatre Scene*) wrote: “*Buried* is like a gift of hope for the miners of America...It's boastful, heartwarming, and frustrating all at the same time...true emotions rang out, moved the audience and made the lives of the miners part of ours.” George Weinberg-Harter wrote: “Shining through the universal aspect of the show's material, the particular experiences of the family members, give touching and specific relevance to the drama.”

Writing for *People's Weekly World (PWW)*, Danny Morales wrote: “Anne Feeney's soundtrack to this docudrama, like the writings of the dying miners, will move you to anger, to tears, to joy and maybe even to action.” Morales closes: “Creating collations of organized labor, theatre and the socially conscious to move a message, and subsequently the people, is definitely a renaissance whose time has come.”

The first full production of *Buried* was at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania Studio Theatre, April 3-6, featuring Anne Feeney and a student cast. Houses and audience response again were excellent

Since then, theatres in Chicago, Detroit, and other cities have expressed interest in a production. Please contact Dr. Jerry Starr, 412-341-8694; jmstarr@comcast.net.

Jerry Starr

BURIED: THE SAGO MINE DISASTER

"Coal has been splattered by the blood of too many miners, and that same coal has been washed by the tears of too many widows and their families"—John L. Lewis, former president, United Mine Workers of America.

Characters in order of appearance

Anne Feeney.....	Herself
Deborah Hamner.....	Wife of Junior Hamner
Pamela Campbell.....	Sister-in-law of Martin Bennett
Amber Helms.....	Daughter of Terry Helms
Anna McCloy.....	Wife of Randall McCloy
Peggy Cohen.....	Daughter of Fred Ware, Jr.
Ann Merideth.....	Daughter of Jim Bennett
Joe Hunter.....	Old miner, narrator
Buck Randolph.....	Proprietor, Mountaineer Café
Reggie Wilson.....	<i>London Times</i> correspondent
Jack Spadaro.....	Former MSHA Inspector
Joe Manchin.....	Governor of West Virginia
Bennett Hatfield.....	CEO, International Coal Group
Terry Helms.....	Miner
Wilbur Ross.....	Principal Owner, International Coal Group
Homer Hickam.....	Orator, Miners' Memorial Service
Randall McCloy, Jr.....	Miner
Jim Bennett.....	Miner
Fred Ware, Jr.....	Miner
Junior Hamner.....	Miner
Johnny Stemple.....	Sago Mine Deputy Safety Director
John Collins.....	MSHA National Safety Director
Jeff Toler.....	Sago Mine Superintendent

Opening: "Hillcrest Mine" © James Keelaghan

**I've heard it whispered in the light of dawn
That mountain sometimes moves
That bodes ill for the morning shift
And you know what you're going to lose
Don't go, my son, where the deep coal runs
Turn your back to the mine on the hill
Cause if the dust and the dark
and the gas don't getcha
Then the goons and the bosses will**

**G
G
C - G - Am - C
G
G
C - G - Am - C**

**And they say you don't go, say you don't go
down to the Hillcrest Mine
And they say you don't go, say you don't go
down to the Hillcrest Mine
Cause it's one short step,
you might leave this world behind
And they say you don't go, say you don't go
down to the Hillcrest Mine**

**G
C - G
D - C - D
G - D
C - G
D -
C - G**

Scene 1: The Waiting (Sago Baptist Church)

(The screen shows a slide of the mine. There is the sound of an explosion and the screen goes black.)

Six women are posed in different places across the stage. A telephone rings for each in turn.)

Deborah Hamner

Hello. Yes, this is Deborah Hamner. An accident? What kind of accident? Is my husband alright? Well, who does know? (Pause) I understand. What can I do? The Sago Church? Yes, I'm on my way.

Pamela Campbell

Judy? What's wrong, sis? Slow down, I can't understand you. Yes, of course. Please get a hold of yourself; nobody could possibly know anything yet.

Amber Helms

Amber Helms. Virginia? What's wrong? When? How soon can I come? Well, I have to cancel some appointments, but I'll be there as soon as I can. I'll call you on my cell when I get on the road.

Anna McCloy

Hello. Yes, this is Anna McCloy. I don't want to hear that. Can you come get me; I have two little ones with me? (Pause) Yes, I understand. Well, don't bother yourself, I'll figure this out.

Peggy Cohen

Hello. Hi Helen. How are you? Did I hear about what? An accident? An explosion? No, I haven't heard anything from the company. Are you sure? Oh, good God. Where? Thanks Helen, I'm on my way. (Touchtones phone). Hello, Ann?

Ann Merideth

Peggy? If you're calling about the mine accident, I already know. I'll see you at the church.

The women repeat their lines together at the same time, creating a **chorus** of rising concern.

(Black out).

All six women are seated.

Joe Hunter

(Joe Hunter steps out to address the audience. He is a man in his 60s or 70s, wearing a cap, jeans and a T-shirt, bent over from years in the mine and periodically coughing and inhaling a "puffer" for his respiratory problems.)

Hello everybody. My name is Joe Hunter and I am a career miner. I'm retired now (cough)—my lungs finally gave out. Not to mention my back and my knees, but that's another story. Tonight, I will be your guide to the Sago Mine disaster. Twelve men died and one remains severely disabled.

It starts about 6:30 am the morning of January 2, 2006. There is an explosion in the mine. One of two working crews responds to the dispatcher's call and exits the mine. The other does not.

(As the women are anxious, the director must block almost constant movement in the scene)

Deborah Hamner

Does anybody know anything yet?

Amber Helms

No, but I'm hopeful. I have a very strong bond with my dad. As I was driving down from Ohio, I could feel that he is OK.

Ann Merideth

I wish I could believe that.

Pamela Campbell

All I know is that my sister Judy is so tore up she asked me to come down here and find out what's going on.

Anne Merideth

Anna, what did you do with your little ones?

Anna McCloy

They're with Randy's mother.

Ann Merideth

Thank God for family.

Deborah Hamner

I had a bad feeling about this shift—first shift back from a winter holiday. You wonder how clean the mine was left before the break.

Peggy Cohen

Well, it was bonus pay and there are Christmas bills to cover. My Dad's very generous with his five grandkids.

Anna McCloy

Randy jumped at the bonus pay too. He's our only income so I can stay home with the kids.

Deborah Hamner

Junior felt the same way about me working, but the company didn't give them nothin', not even showers. So...

Pamela Campbell

To the people sittin' in their big offices in the city, miners are just tons per year.

Deborah Hamner

So, sometimes the men had to go out. We didn't know how long the strike would last or whether the company would lock 'em out; and the bills kept piling up, so I got a job. Now, Junior's in this nonunion mine, which is a whole new set of worries.

Anna McCloy

Sometimes I wish I did have a job. It's a lot on Randy and my life is so home bound. Sometimes I just get the blues.

Deborah Hamner

Hey Anna, we've all had 'em...crying spells, afraid to answer the phone. That's when we lean on each other; because we're miners' wives.

Amber Helms

And daughters.

Deborah Hamner

And daughters.

Anna McCloy

It does make you tough. When he's underground, he's underground. I have to make the decisions when problems come up.

Ann Merideth

I can't believe this is happening now. Dad's been planning to retire in April. He's put 25 years in the mines and he's been waiting for his social security to kick in so he can stop.

Peggy Cohen

(Pause). I didn't get a call until 10am, two to three hours late and then it was from a friend, not even from the company. I think that's disgraceful.

Pamela Campbell

They still don't have a rescue crew in place.

Ann Merideth

I just hate the waiting and the not knowing. You don't know if they're suffocating, if they've been cut or crushed or burned...

Amber Helms

(interrupting) C'mon Ann, let's be hopeful.

Deborah Hamner

Junior and his friends would talk about their work—the stuff that happened in the mine. Or the stuff that almost happened. Sometimes I just had to leave the room.

Peggy Cohen

My mother used to say a day did not go by that dad would go down in that mine that she didn't worry he wouldn't come back up.

Ann Merideth

Lots of women find comfort in the Bible.

Deborah Hamner

You find comfort where you can. And some can't. I knew a woman once who would just start shaking and she couldn't stop.

Ann Merideth

What happened to her?

Deborah Hamner

You know, I really can't recall. She just wasn't cut out to be a miner's wife. If a woman says she doesn't worry, she's lying. As soon as they go to work, they are on your mind.

The Green Rolling Hills of West Virginia (D)

© Hazel Dickens

My daddy said don't ever be a miner	D - A - A7 - D
Or a miner's grave is all you'll ever own	G - A
There's hard times everywhere –	D – D7
I can't find a dime to spare	G
These are the worst times I have ever known	D – A – A7 - D

**But the green and rolling hills of West Virginia
Are the nearest thing to heaven that I know
Though the times are sad and drear
And I cannot linger here
They'll keep me and never let me go (2)**

Scene 2: Making the News (Mountaineer Café)

(Behind the counter is Buck Randolph, the proprietor, a Vietnam veteran in his middle fifties. He wears a cap and apron over jeans and a plaid shirt. Joe Hunter comes in carrying a newspaper. He sits down and spreads it out.)

Joe Hunter

It makes me damn mad, that's what.

Buck Randolph

Don't start now. This is a time for sadness.

Joe Hunter

If you don't get mad, you'll always be sad.

Buck Randolph

You're not gonna lay all that socialist union crap on me are you?

Joe Hunter

You got all these holy rollers around here blaming God for everything—God's will, God's time—and I can't blame the company? Are you saying the damn coal barons are above God? Let me lay it out for you.

Buck Randolph

Spare me. I'm just trying to make a living here and I never seem to get it.

Joe Hunter

You need a flip chart?

Buck Randolph

You old fart; it's all Power-Point presentation now.

Joe Hunter

I got a power point for you hillbilly—just bend over. Bush can ask God to bless the trapped miners, but his people have not done jackshit to keep the coal companies straight. The companies sure ain't gonna spend money on new equipment, cleanups or anything that cuts their profits. They bury the reports, they bury the fines, they bury the news and they bury us.

(A man in a sport jacket, slacks and white shirt without tie enters. He speaks with an English accent.)

Reggie Wilson

Is this the Mountaineer Café?

Buck Randolph

That's what the sign says.

Reggie Wilson

I'm looking for the proprietor.

Buck Randolph

You found him. Buck Randolph. And you are?

Reggie Wilson

My name is Reggie Wilson. I'm from the *London Times*.

Buck Randolph

Yeah, you sound different. What can I do for you?

Reggie Wilson

I'm here to cover the Sago Mine accident.

Buck Randolph

All the way from England to write about Sago?

Reggie Wilson

Well, I'm based in this country year 'round. There's mining in twenty six states here and all over the UK. A story like this connects us all.

Buck Randolph

Well good, what can I do for you?

Reggie Wilson

My editors thought it would add something to the official reports to get the views of local people. I'd like to do that here if I may.

Buck Randolph

OK, but you're gonna have to order something.

Reggie Wilson

Great! We can start with two eggs scrambled and some home fries.

Buck Randolph

Well, this here's Joe Hunter. Don't encourage him or he'll talk your ear off. The others are in the back putting distance between themselves and Joe. Hey everybody! This is Reggie Wilson. He's from England. He's writing about the mine so make him feel at home.

(A man enters) Jack Spadaro has returned to the hills! What's up, Jack? Missed my apple pie?

Jack Spadaro

Always Buck. But what I really miss is the field. Since being branded a troublemaker, I've been cooped up in an office shuffling paper and it's driving me crazy. This one is too big to miss.

Buck Randolph

Jack, this is Reggie Wilson from *The London Times*. Reggie, Jack here's a lifetime government regulator—one of the best. You recall the Massey Coal slurry spill in Inez Kentucky back in 2,000? The EPA called it the worst environmental disaster in the history of the Eastern United States. How big Jack?

Jack Spadaro

More than 300 million gallons of toxic sludge dumped into 100 miles of waterways.

Buck Randolph

Jack here was on the case. Tell him what you saw, Jack.

Jack Spadaro

I discovered that Larry Wilson from MSHA, the Mine Safety and Health Administration, already had made a list of safety recommendations to Massey after a big spill six years before. Wilson said that at least five people in the company were told there would be another breakthrough, but did nothing because they didn't want to spend money for another site.

Buck Randolph

Tell him what you were going to do, Jack.

Jack Spadaro

We were ready to issue Massey citations for criminal negligence—with MSHA accountable as well. Then Bush got “elected” and everything changed. Tim Thompson took over the investigation, cancelled almost all the interviews, and told me to my face, “We’re not going to point any fingers at MSHA.”

Joe Hunter

MSHA chief Dave Lauriski himself then stepped in. Tell Reggie what he told you to do.

Jack Spadaro

Lauriski handed me a watered down version of the report and said he needed me to sign it. Eight violations were cut to just one for \$55,000; a slap on the wrist for a billion dollar company.

Reggie Wilson

So, what did you do?

Jack Spadaro

I told him to take my name off that report. A month later, I filed a complaint with the Department of Labor that Bush's people were obstructing the team's work.

Reggie Wilson

And....?

Jack Spadaro

They sat on it for two years and then decided that not one of my allegations could be substantiated...which is a flat out lie. In June 2003, I was placed on administrative leave, accused of “failing to follow instructions,” and got demoted, with a \$35,000 pay cut.

Joe Hunter

Reggie, that's how government works down here for folks like us. You have a guy in one of the agencies that actually wants to stand up for what's right. And, because he rocks their boat, he gets thrown overboard.

Reggie Wilson

You're right. That story explains a lot. I am going to write it up for the *Times*.

Jack Spadaro

Feel free to call me for quotes any time.

Reggie Wilson

I certainly will. Say, where would I be able to find the families of the miners?

Buck Randolph

I hear they're gathering at the Sago Baptist Church. Pastor Wease Day has made the church into a kind of refuge for those waiting for the news.

Quecreek Flood (Dm)

© Anais Mitchell

**Safe above ground the boss paced around
Surveying the scene of the flood
After chasing away the UMWA
So inspections were cheap – still he didn't lose sleep
He just stood in the sun – “What could we have done?”
He said, “This was an act of God.”**

Dm – C – Bb (vamp)

Dm – C – Bb – Dm/ Dm – C – A7/Bb – A (2x)/ C – A (2X)

Bb – A (3x) – Dm – C – Bb – A - Dm

Scene 3: The Reckoning (Sago Baptist Church)

(The women have changed position and dress.)

Pamela Campbell

Does anyone have the time?

Deborah Hamner

It's almost 9:00pm.

Peggy Cohen

Tomorrow morning will make it two full days.

Anna McCloy

I don't see how they can still be alive. What's that? (Pause). It looks like the Governor is here.

(Everyone stands.)

Joe Manchin

Folks, I have some bad news. They found one man, killed by the explosion, about seven hundred feet from where the men were working.

Amber Helms

Cries out and covers her face.

Joe Manchin

Honey, we don't have confirmation who it was; they're not sure.

Amber Helms

That was my daddy. He worked there every day. That was his spot.

Ann Merideth

And the others?

Joe Manchin

No word on the others, yet.

Ann Merideth

Oh, Amber, I'm so sorry.

The women embrace Amber. She then steps out of the circle and addresses the audience.

A man stands behind Amber in the shadows. He is Terry Helms.

Amber Helms

Terry Michael Helms was my father. He was a devoted father, a reliable friend, and a fantastic role model.

He was a man who would stop in the middle of a rainy day to help someone change a tire...even if he was in a hurry. He was the person that people called whenever they had problems. There was an ice

storm in Preston County and one of the big tree limbs fell on my cousin's house, and my dad went out there. My cousin couldn't get it down. My dad said,

Terry Helms (behind in shadows)

Hold up. I know how to do it.

Amber Helms

And he did. My father taught me that I could do anything. Once, I was mowing leaves and they caught fire. Dad ran to me, got me off and stopped it. I didn't want to get back on, but he made me overcome my fears.

Terry Helms

Sweetheart, you can do anything you put your mind to.

Amber Helms

In his eyes, I could have flown to the moon. But once, I was chasing my brother down a parking lot. A metal wire caught me under the chin and threw me backwards onto the curb. The next thing I knew, my dad was holding me in his arms, kissing me and just bawling. I'd never seen my dad cry before. He was a tough guy, but that's how much he loved me.

Dad was always there for me and my brother. If I needed ideas for a project, he came up with the best ideas. If I needed an outfit for school, he would help me pick it out; and he had good taste. He would rather buy my brother and me a trendy pair of shoes or a nice shirt before he'd buy himself something.

He came to all of my track and basketball games; from the beginning if possible or straight from work if not. And he wasn't just a father to me and my brother; he was a father to many of my friends. On my basketball team, his nickname was Dad Helms.

Man (Off Stage)

There are still miracles, because there are twelve men alive!

(The women shriek with glee and embrace each other.)

Man (Off Stage)

Man it's a great day. It's going to be another Christmas!

Others

Twelve alive! Twelve alive!

Someone starts singing "How Great Thou Art" and everyone joins in.

O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the words Thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
The power throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, How great...

The chorus is interrupted by a voice from off stage: Everybody, please listen. I'm Bennett Hatfield, the CEO of ICG (Singing stops). There's been a lack of communication. What we were told was wrong. Only one survived. Randall McCloy was the only survivor...

Voices

You liar!

Gathering Flowers for the Master's Bouquet (D)

© Marvin Blumgardner

**Death is an angel sent down from above,
Sent for the buds of the flowers we love.
Surely it's so, for in heaven's own way,
Each soul is a flower in the Master's Bouquet.**

C – C7 – F – C
C – D – G
C – C7 – F – G
C – G – C

**Gathering flowers for the Master's Bouquet,
Beautiful flowers that will never decay.
Gathered by angels and carried away,
Forever to bloom in the Master's Bouquet.**

F – C
C – D – G
C – C7 – F – G
C – G – C

Scene 4: Meet Wilbur Ross, Jr. (Media Center)

(Picture of a New York skyscraper. Reggie interviews Wilbur Ross, a man 55-70, dressed in a suit and tie)

Reggie Wilson

This is Reggie Wilson reporting for the BBC. I am here with Wilbur Ross, the chairman and principal owner of the International Coal Group. His company is the owner of the Sago Mine in West Virginia where twelve miners died earlier this week.

Mr. Ross, *Fortune Magazine* has hailed you as the “Bankruptcy King,” but your critics have called you a vulture who buys up failing industries, uses the courts to cancel obligations to your workers, and then sells the new companies off for huge profits. Is that accurate?

Wilbur Ross

No, a vulture picks flesh off a dead carcass. If you have to pick a bird, we’re a phoenix that rebuilds itself from the ashes.

Reggie Wilson

Isn’t it true, however, that the key to your successful turnarounds is to get the courts to release these companies from all health care and pension obligations, leaving all workers and retirees without coverage?

Wilbur Ross

I think it’s awful that these people got displaced. Unfortunately, that’s our system right now. Health care costs are a crushing burden for American companies. We need national health care like everywhere else.

Reggie Wilson

Didn’t your former wife, New York State Lieutenant Governor Betsy McCaughey, lead the charge against Hillary Clinton’s national health care plan?

Wilbur Ross

Former wife, as you said. And the Clinton plan was a bad plan.

Reggie Wilson

You certainly have done well enough—coal prices have more than doubled in the past two years.

Wilbur Ross

Well, they have been following the rise in oil prices. Coal is still the cheapest form of energy we have and it provides more than half of our nation’s electricity.

Reggie Wilson

Cheaper though it may be, your profits have been soaring. In fact, didn’t you offer your ICG officials huge stock and cash bonuses to ratchet up their production and profit goals at Sago?

Wilbur Ross

I offered my men incentives, yes. What’s wrong with that?

Reggie Wilson

The problem is that Sago’s accident rate is three times the national average. We’ve heard that, given such pressure for profits, your people would not tolerate any extended shutdowns to correct roof problems or gas leaks. How are you feeling about this now?

Wilbur Ross

Oh my God, it's the worst week of my entire life.

Reggie Wilson

Would you call this a safe mine?

Wilbur Ross

I believe the mine was fundamentally safe.

Reggie Wilson

Last year the mine was cited for 208 violations, 96 of them significant or substantial.

Wilbur Ross

Well, there were violations. Every mine in the country has violations...

Reggie Wilson

How could you keep the mine open with all those violations?

Wilbur Ross

Well, you have to put it into the context of the industry. I mean...

Reggie Wilson

Every day men go down into those holes...

Wilbur Ross

I understand.

Reggie Wilson

Where, according to the records, and you've seen them...

Wilbur Ross

Sure.

Reggie Wilson

...the roofs keep falling in. They found combustible materials in there just weeks before the accident. Were you comfortable sending men into that hole?

Wilbur Ross

We were comfortable based on the assurances from our management that they felt that it was a safe situation.

Reggie Wilson

Twenty roof collapses, thirteen partial shutdowns. Didn't you start to wonder whether that mine was about to blow?

Wilbur Ross

Well, shut downs and about to blow are not exactly the same circumstance.

Reggie Wilson

When you get reports of the roof collapsing again and again and again, doesn't that concern you?

Wilbur Ross

Sure it does and I can tell you that we have never scrimped on safety expenditures.

Reggie Wilson

I understand there's a trust fund being set up for the families of the deceased miners. How much has your company put in?

Wilbur Ross

\$2 million. We put the first \$2 million in and we're also...

Reggie Wilson

You're a billionaire. And your company earns close to a billion dollars a year. How did you come up with the figure of \$2 million?

Wilbur Ross

The board decided to put the first \$2 million into the fund and then try to raise more money for the workers.

Reggie Wilson

As the chairman, would you call that generous?

Wilbur Ross

We think it's a good start toward helping these people. Look, I'm not the bad guy here. Every single company I took over would have been liquidated had we not bought it. In fact, two union leaders have paid tribute to me for saving those jobs.

Reggie Wilson

But what about the men's safety?

Wilbur Ross

We must compete in a system of global capitalism. It would be economic suicide for ICG to get too far out in front of the competition on costly reforms. But we are taking the lead on sharing new technologies with the other companies. We don't want the politicians trying to score points with voters at our expense. They don't know what's needed.

You Will Answer © Anne Feeney

**Last night as I lay tossing and a-turning in my bed
I dreamed that I was in the presence of the Lord
With eleven Sago miners who had gone to their reward
And God looked down on those miners and He said –
“Who has sent my faithful servants here unbidden to My throne?
He will answer on that Judgment Day
Oh he will answer (he will answer) on that Judgment Day
He will answer on that Judgment Day
Oh he will answer (he will answer) on that Judgment Day
He will answer on that Judgment Day,”**

**“I have fashioned those who labor in My image,” God did say,
“And I did not call these miners home to Me,
Many years I had allotted them with friends and family,
Now the heaven weep to hear their orphans pray.”
“You cannot serve God and Mammon, if it’s Mammon that you
choose, You will answer on that Judgment Day –
Now what good is all your wealth if your eternal soul you lose?
You will answer on that Judgment Day.
Oh you will answer (you will answer) on that Judgment Day
You will answer on that Judgment Day.”**

**It is easier to get a camel through a needle’s eye
Than a rich man into heaven it’s been told
Every time a human life’s cut short by avarice for gold
There will be a day of judgment bye and bye.
If you’ve garnered earthly riches and you come to heaven’s door
You will answer on that Judgment Day
To serve God you must renounce your wealth and share it with the
poor
Or you will answer on that Judgment Day.
You will answer on that Judgment Day.
Oh you will answer (you will answer) on that Judgment Day**

You will answer on that Judgment Day.”

Scene 5: The Price of Life (Mountaineer Café)

(Buck is behind the counter. Joe and Anne Merideth are at the counter and Reggie walks in.)

Buck Randolph

Hey Reggie, I caught your interview on the tube. Nice job. (Gets out cup and pours coffee)

Joe Hunter

You done good, Reggie. It sure sounds like Mr. Wilbur Ross is trying to buy his way out of this scandal with a couple million dollars of public relations.

Anne Merideth

Maybe that’s how they do it in New York, but this is West Virginia. People here care for each other. Money’s nothing.

Reggie Wilson

You know, I like what your Governor said recently, something like “we can’t put a price on the life of a miner.”

Buck Randolph

Yeah, Joe Manchin’s alright. But he’s wrong. The government and the companies put prices on human life all the time. A landmine took off my left leg below the knee when I was in Vietnam. After rehab, they told me I was entitled to a monthly compensation of \$311. A guy I rehabbed with told me that if it had been above the knee, I would have got over \$500 a month. Both legs off above the knee and it’s up to \$1,600 a month. Now, how do you think they came up with those numbers?

Joe Hunter

You lost your leg, but let’s talk death here. How about that old Kentucky miner killed last year? MSHA fined the company just \$400 for what they called “significant and substantial” violations. A man is dead and the fine is \$400.

Buck Randolph

I can beat that. You guys surely recall that big mine explosion in Alabama about 4-5 years back. Thirteen guys died and MSHA fined the company something like \$400,000. The company appealed and some friendly administrative judge cut the fines to just \$3,000. Help me out Reggie, how much does that figure to?

Reggie Wilson

(Looking at a pocket calculator). That, my friend, is roughly \$230 per life.

Joe Hunter

You still don’t win because in my case, the company never even paid the \$400. So the answer is zero. They put zero value on the life of a miner.

Buck Randolph

Well, if that counts, I’m throwing in that McNeil woman whose husband was killed at the Gooseneck Mine. The company was fined \$70,000 or so, but filed for bankruptcy and never paid a dime—a goose egg for the Gooseneck fatality.

Reggie Wilson

Settle down boys. Now, here's a question for both of you. We know that MSHA is in charge of regulating the coal companies, but who runs MSHA?

Joe Hunter

Coal company stooges; appointed by the President. Not one union man, not one environmentalist, not one public servant. Talk about the foxes guarding the hen house.

Buck Randolph

Reggie, you'd think the public would care who represents their interests, but most folks just don't know. Certainly, they don't give a thought about the hard work others do to make their lives so comfortable. It's easier to believe that the meat on their dinner table starts out frozen and shrink wrapped or that electricity just lives in their wall sockets waiting for prime-time TV.

Ann Merideth

My dad certainly was proud that he helped light this nation with his labor.

(Turning to the audience) My dad was James Bennett and this is the note he left for my family:

James Bennett (behind in shadows)

11:40 am: Lily, I love you. If someone finds this, please give this to my wife. I love you. We have air right now, but the smoke is bad. Tell my mother I love her and my kids, love daddy.

3:07 pm.: The air is bad. I don't know how long we can last.

4:22 pm: Time is running out for us. We have not heard anything from the outside yet.

4:25 pm: I love you...

Ann Merideth

And he tried to write my name, but could not finish.

My dad was going to retire this past April in 2006, but he never got the chance. He and my mom was going to do some traveling together and enjoy their seven grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Daddy was a good Christian man; very active in his church. It's hard for me to walk into our church and not find my dad standing at the door, greeting folks as they came in with a huge smile and a handshake. He knew he was going to get a big hug from me. He would say

James Bennett

I'm glad to see you this morning, Sis.

Ann Merideth

After church, he would yell

James Bennett

Do y'all want to come down to the house and watch a movie this afternoon with your mom and me?

Ann Merideth

We had our family traditions, like the annual wiener roast in August and making homemade ice cream on Christmas Eve. But now, at our family traditions, my dad is not there and it's just not fair.

Daddy really enjoyed life. (She tells this story with rising embarrassment). One time, Dad was telling jokes as we walked into the Hecht's Department Store, and his false teeth fell out on the floor. They scooted across the floor and my dad did a belly flopper on the floor chasing after his teeth. They went under the lady's clothing rack, and he dives right underneath and gets 'em. And he looks up at the lady

looking through the clothes and says, "Excuse me, ma'am, I lost my teeth." He spits on 'em and then puts 'em back in his mouth and just goes on like nothing ever happened. (Pause)

While I was waiting in the church, I kept thinking my dad was gonna walk through the doors at any time; as if we were playing hide and go seek like when I was a little girl. When we were told the miners were found alive and would be coming over to the church, I went up that road to be closer to the opening of that mine because I knew my dad would be coming out of there. And I knew the first words he would say would be

James Bennett

Praise the Lord, we're all out alive.

How Much for the Life of a Miner? © Anne Feeney

**You've heard "Sixteen Tons" and "The Coal Tattoo"
In the coalfield danger is nothing new
Here's the question I'm putting to you
'How much for the life of a miner?'
It should come as no surprise
That every time a miner dies
You'll hear them spout the same old lies
How much for the life of a miner?**

**Somewhere far away from here accountants will project
Actuaries speculate on causes and effect
No pesky regulations from the thieves that they elect
And auditor confirm the yield from their benign neglect**

**Each state sets the price for a leg that's lost
Lose an arm or an ear – there's a preset cost
When the air goes bad and there's no exhaust
How much for the life of a miner?
A slap on the wrist or even a fine
Reversed on appeal on down the line
"An act of God," the courts opine.
How much for the life of a miner?**

**Politicians posture at the mine face solemnly
Live reporters swarm like flies around the tragedy
Preachers will proclaim the Lord behaves mysteriously
And PR spokesmen orchestrate deniability
And then their widows, sons and daughters come to you and me
And ask "How much for the life of a miner?
How much for the life of a miner?"**

Scene 6: Memorial Service (Sago Baptist Church)

Joe Manchin

We cannot know the purpose of this tragedy, but I pledge to you we will determine the cause. And now, it is my distinct honor to introduce Dr. Homer Hickam, a native West Virginian, who came from the coalfields and went onto to fame as a NASA engineer and best-selling author. He will lead us in paying honor to those brave men who gave their lives caring for their families and providing electrical power for this great nation.

Homer Hickam

As this tragedy unfolded, the national media kept asking me: Who are these men? And what kind of men would still mine the deep coal?

The answer is where they lived. Look around you. This is a place where many lessons are learned, of true things that shape people as surely as rivers carve valleys, or rain melts mountains, or currents push apart the sea. Here, miners still walk with a trudging grace to and from vast, deep mines.

(Moving toward front pew) The people endure here as they always have for they understand that God has determined that there is no joy greater than hard work, and no water holier than the sweat off a man's brow.

In such a place as this, a dozen men may die, but death can never destroy how they lived their lives, or why.

And so we come together on this day to recall these men and in hope that this service will help the families with their great loss.

For in this old place, there still lives a people like the miners of Sago and their families; people who yet believe in the old ways, the old virtues, the old truths; who still lift their heads from the darkness into the light, and say to the nation and all the world to hear:

*We are proud of who we are.
We stand up for what we believe.
We keep our families together.
We trust in God.*

We do what needs to be done.

We are not afraid.

(Pause) And now, everyone is invited to join us for refreshments in the reception room downstairs.

(The six women remain seated).

Pamela Campbell

Anna, how's Randy comin' along?

Anna McCloy

The doctors say it's a miracle he's alive. He had damage to all his organs; but he's a fighter. He's off the kidney dialysis and breathing tube.

Peggy Cohen

So, he can get out of bed?

Anna McCloy

No, his right side is froze.

Deborah Hamner

I'm so sorry. Can he talk?

Anna McCloy

Not yet. The doctors think someday.

Amber Helms

Does he recognize you?

Anna McCloy

I was talking to him and I told him, I said, Randy, I know that you can't talk right now, but if you know who I am, just give me one kiss, and he kissed me.

Ann Merideth

Praise the Lord. Randy's coming back. Does he understand what happened?

Anna McCloy

I'm trying to keep things positive for Randy. My first priority is getting him home.

Pamela Campbell

I see my sister die just a little bit every day because she lost half her heart. Deb, how are you holdin' up?

Deborah Hamner

I still can't believe it. Junior was my high school sweetheart. We'd been together 32 years.

Peggy Cohen

We've all been crying and not sleeping about my dad, but you shared a home.

Deborah Hamner

My daughter Sara's a great comfort and I'm still trying to figure out what happened and maybe do something about it. That's what keeps me going.

Ann Merideth

It feels like that piece of my dad that has always been in me is missing, if you know what I mean.

Amber Helms

I do. And it aches. (pause) I'm proud that my dad was a miner. I think it *is* an honorable way to make a living for your family. Mr. Hickam's right—it is a public service.

Ann Merideth

The thing is, if you grow up in a miner family, you usually don't think of doing anything else. Your dad and uncles lead the way and you just pick up your lunch pail and follow.

Anna McCloy

What choices do we have? Randy couldn't get work as an electrician. Unless you're a coal miner or you have a college degree, you don't make any money.

Amber Helms

Miners do make more money. They can even send their kids to college like my dad did.

Pamela Campbell

But their bodies pay a price. We all can tell a career miner by the way he walks.

All

Verbalize agreement and Peggy chimes in...

Peggy Cohen

My dad suffered broken ribs, punctured lungs, and had to have pins put in his ankles.

Amber Helms

My dad sure didn't want my brother to be a coal miner. He said he would do anything in his power to keep my brother out of the mines.

Ann Merideth

My dad kept going back because he was a good worker and a good provider, **not** because he wasn't afraid.

Anna McCloy

Randy told me something was gonna happen, and he was gonna get out of there. It was too dangerous.

Deborah Hamner

My husband's friend, Joe McGowan, told me that Junior told him just two weeks before the explosion that the mine "was nothing but a walking time bomb." He said, "They're going to kill us all."

Anna McCloy

The company is claiming it was a lightning strike—an act of God—and we should just move on.

Deborah Hamner

But we don't know what happened. So, are we gonna let them bury the truth along with the men...or are we going to stand up and demand an accounting?

Amber Helms

A lot of us are getting lawyers. We might be able to sue the company.

Deborah Hamner

I wanna to be a voice for coal miners—something for the living as well as the dead. Maybe even go to Washington. The Mineworkers have offered to help with education and outreach.

Amber Helms

Well, the Governor is calling for hearings—we're all looking for answers.

Peggy Cohen

I sure got a lot of questions. I keep seeing Dad slowly suffocating down there, wondering what was he thinking.

Anna McCloy

Sorry, Deb, I just can't do that. I don't know nothin' about mining and I got my hands full with Randy and the kids.

Ann Merideth

I'm sorry too Deb, but you can't count on me neither. My brother John and my Uncle Donald are talking to the media for us. They're mad about this and I think people will listen to them better than me.

Deborah Hamner

Everybody says politics is for the men. I don't know. Does it sound like a bad idea?

Anna McCloy

We sure don't want to risk any compensation we might have coming. You do have a lawyer, don't you?

Deborah Hamner

Yes. And he's advising me. But he didn't tell me I couldn't speak up about this.

Pamela Campbell

Deb, I'm with you. I've got enough mouth for all of us. My sister just wants to be alone, but I'm ready to speak up for her, my nephew, my entire family. Do they let the families take part in those hearings?

Deborah Hamner

Well, I understand they never have, but maybe with enough noise, they won't be able to keep us out.

Peggy Cohen

Deb, miners' wives have always had to stand in for their men. Remember Matawan and Harlan County. Sometimes they've carried pickets; sometimes they've picked up guns; sometimes they've gone to jail.

Deborah Hamner

Well, I'm not lookin' to do all that, but I'm sure not ready for the rockin' chair. This is important. These men mattered.

Peggy Cohen

(Stands) Deb, you can count me in too! I got a lot of reasons to do this!

(To the audience)

Fred Ware, Jr. was my father. My dad was a miner for over forty years. He loved being a coal miner. He just said he would never retire. He said

Fred Ware (behind in shadows)

I'll probably die working in the mines.

Peggy Cohen

And he did. I was taken to a makeshift morgue at an elementary school to identify my dad's body. Later I took home his lunch pail.

Dad drove a 1984 Chevy truck with over 400,000 miles. He called it "Old Blue." We used to pick on him about getting a new truck, but he had no intentions of getting a new one. He would say

Fred Ware

"Old Blue" is broke-in just right.

Peggy Cohen

We went everywhere in "Old Blue."

Now that he has been taken from us, he won't be able to do the things he loved, like flea markets and auctions. Once Dad bought a pair of skis, and while we were sledding, he decided to ski. He used broomsticks as the ski poles. We laughed so hard that Dad actually did pretty good skiing, since he never had skied before.

Fred Ware

(Wavering on poles) How'm I doin'?

Peggy Cohen

Dad was always willing to help anyone; especially with fixing things that were broke. Now, we won't be able to go to Dad's house and watch him tinkering with things, tryin' to get them to work.

He loved hunting. And he loved nature. We used to sit on the porch and watch humming birds and talk and laugh. He would play with the grandkids, always giving them treats. Dad won't be able to see his five grandchildren grow up.

Anytime I had a question or needed to talk, he was there. He would call me everyday to tell me when he was home from work. Every day! And even on days we were together, he still would call me every evening to tell me that he loved me. I miss those calls.

Sago

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**His workshirts are folded
In a chair by the bed
I can't bear to put them away
I'm too numb to think
I'm too tired to sleep
I keep repeating the words he would pray
Set your affection
On the things above
And not on the things of this earth
Do you think God imagined
He'd ever find
A man of such infinite worth
They say it was lightning
Or sparks and methane
Or maybe a company's crime
What I wouldn't give
What I wouldn't give
To see him walk out of the Sago mine**

**I thought it was thunder
I heard on that day
A new year and Monday besides
We were planning a trip
For all the grand kids
He had three months to go when he died
When word first went out
They had found them alive
I believed it was going
To be fine
What I wouldn't give**

**What I wouldn't give
To see them walk out of the Sago mine**

**Trapped in the blast
Twelve miners went deep
Their air packs had to be shared
They hit bolts and plates
To signal and wait
For a rescue that never get there**

**But the hours went by
And the smoke got so bad
In silence their last letters done
Then they fell off their pails
Asleep and so still
While the cameras on the surface rolled on**

**They say Jesus works miracles
He made the water to wine
What I wouldn't give
What I wouldn't give
To see him walk out of the Sago mine**

Scene 7: Women Respond (Mountaineer Café)

(Amber Helms, Deborah Hamner, Pamela Campbell, and Peggy Cohen are seated at a table).

Buck Randolph

(Brings pot of coffee and four cups on tray and sets it down).
Ladies, may I ask what's going on?

Deborah Hamner

We're having a meeting, gonna get to the bottom of this, find out what happened.

Amber Helms

Yeah, Buck, did you see us at the press conference on the TV?

Buck Randolph

You all really gave them company men a piece of your mind.

Peggy Cohen

We're gonna change the way things are done in the mines.

Pamela Campbell

We've been hearing from everybody's offices—Byrd, Rockefeller, Rahall. They think we got a chance to pass a new bill.

Joe Hunter

A new bill? For miner safety? Never happen. Those good ol' boys will never let it happen.

Pamela Campbell

Oh, what do you know, you old coot! Just next week we got a hearing in Buckhannon called by the Governor and MSHA.

Deborah Hamner

OK, let's get started. As ya'll know, we've been learnin' **a lot** from the Mineworkers about these issues and we finally understand what doesn't make sense. This letter from Randy McCloy is a revelation. Does everybody have a copy?

All

Voices affirming.

Pamela Campbell

It's a miracle that Randy survived. Almost like God wanted him to bear witness to the wrongs that were done to our men. Can you believe their self-rescuers didn't work?

Deborah Hamner

It looks like we've already started. Let's read the first part.

Randall McCloy

(Haltingly) April 27, 2006, To the families and loved ones of my co-workers, victims of the Sago Mine disaster: The explosion happened right after we arrived at the mine face. The mine filled quickly with fumes and thick smoke. The first thing we did was activate our rescuers, as we had been trained. At least four of the rescuers did not function. There were not enough rescuers to go around.

Pamela Campbell

(Looking up) What an outrage! I mean one hour of oxygen isn't much to begin with, but then *even some of them* didn't work.

Peggy Cohen

I heard that most of the oxygen packs were expired or close to it.

Pamela Campbell

And who knows what training the men got? I heard they don't even practice breathing through the air packs because the company don't want to spend the money on training units.

Peggy Cohen

If they get any training at all. John Boni admitted that he never took the safety class on the rescuers even though he signed the form.

Pamela Campbell

The company told him to. The guy who installed the seals also claimed training he didn't get.

Deborah Hamner

And those are the ones we know about.

Randall McCloy

We then tried to return to the man-trip, but the air was so bad we had to go back to the coal rib, where we hung a curtain to try to protect ourselves.

Peggy Cohen

(Looking up) That's all they could do? Why no marked escapeways to lead the men out safely? And there's the lifelines Nick Rahall mentioned. You grab the rope and feel the cones which point your way out of the mine. How much could that cost?

Deborah Hamner

Where were the supplies for the barricade? The Mineworkers told me that in Canada they have rescue chambers with extra air supplies, food and first aid. Why do they have better protection for miners than we do?

Randall McCloy

We attempted to signal our location to the surface by beating on the mine bolts and plates with a sledgehammer. This effort caused us to breathe much harder. We never heard a responsive blast or shot from the surface.

Amber Helms

A sledgehammer! In Australia, miners carry devices that work like the text messaging of your cell phone. They cost only \$20 each, but the Bush Administration turned down a proposal to use them here.

Randall McCloy

We eventually quit our attempts at signaling. The air grew worse, so I tried to lie as low as possible and take shallow breaths. We were worried and afraid, but we began to accept our fate.

Peggy Cohen

(Looking up) Where were the rescue crews? It took them 12 hours to start a team into the mine while our men did what they were trained to do and waited to die.

Randall McCloy

Junior Toler led us all in the Sinners Prayer. (Off stage another voice starts the sinner's prayer and tails off: "Heavenly father, I come to you in prayer asking forgiveness for my sins. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward you.") Then, someone suggested we write letters to our loved ones. Later, some drifted off into what appeared to be a deep sleep. The room grew still and I continued to sit and wait, unable to do much.

Deborah Hamner

(Longer pause. Looking up) That's all there is. We know the rescue failed, but could this explosion have been prevented in the first place?

Pamela Campbell

ICG claims it was caused by a lightening strike.

Peggy Cohen

I'm not buying it. The lightening would've had to travel 200 feet underground. The union thinks the fire was ignited by friction from falling rocks on metal roof supports.

Deborah Hamner

We don't know for sure what caused the spark, but we do know the mine was not properly equipped for a fire hazzard. And why are they using these cheap foam seals instead of the concrete blocks they used to? If the seals hadn't blown, the men would be alive.

Pamela Campbell

ICG officials said the seals met the legal standard.

Deborah Hamner

That's not saying much.

Amber Helms

They're desperate to avoid fines and lawsuits.

Deborah Hamner

They had nearly 50 citations in December alone.

Pamela Campbell

It probably was worse than that. With a non-union mine like Sago, the men are afraid to speak out for fear of losing their jobs.

Peggy Cohen

Inspections are one thing, but the real problem is that the fines aren't big enough to get the company's attention.

Deborah Hamner

I read in *USA Today* that there were larger fines for Janet Jackson's breast exposure in the Super Bowl than for the deaths of the miners in Alabama. When will these fines become a real incentive to coal mine safety?

(Pause, looking at notes) God, this is quite a list—fire bossing, seals, self-rescuers, barricades, escapeways, rescue teams, tracking and communications, inspections, fines...Is that about it?

Pamela Campbell

Until we think of something else.

Buck Randolph

So, ladies, what's the plan?

Deborah Hamner

The plan? We're gonna bear witness, that's what. Just like the Good Book says. We're each gonna tell them company men and politicians about different things that bother us—the seals that don't hold, the rescuers that don't work...

Amber Helms

(Each voice louder than the last). The communication devices they don't have, the rescue teams that aren't there. ...

Peggy Cohen

The inspectors that look the other way...

Pamela Campbell

The fines that don't get collected.

Joe Hunter

You think they'll listen?

Deborah Hamner

We're gonna make them listen. And it's not just the West Virginia politicians who are with us. Congressman Miller, Senator Kennedy and Hillary Clinton are all working on this.

Peggy Cohen

Twelve men, good family men, lost their lives, and we deserve honest answers to our questions.

Joe Hunter

I'm sorry ladies. I've just seen too much over the years. The room will be full of lawyers and politicians and coal company officials. Have you ever done anything like this?

Amber Helms

Not really, no. I'm only 23 years old.

Joe Hunter

Well, what makes you think, you can do it?

(The women rise and start to leave)

Deborah Hamner

Because we can.

Joe Hunter

You know, miners' families have never been invited to these hearings in the past.

Pamela Campbell

Well, there's a first time for everything. You just watch us.

Joe Hunter

(Pleasantly) Well, good luck and have a nice day!

Pamela Campbell

We'll have a nice day! Don't you tell us what to do!

Joe Hunter

Raises hands in self-defense.

(Women leave)

Buck Randolph

Reggie, what do you think? Have they got a shot?

Reggie Wilson

I sure hope so, but I fear they are going to discover the quintessential position of a professional politician—above suspicion, beyond reproach (pause) and beneath contempt.

Joe Hunter

You know what Lincoln said: You can fool some of the people all of the time and (pause) it's a shame so many of them are in Congress.

Reggie Wilson

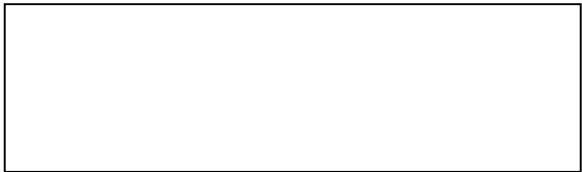
You can't count on the press either. My editors have called me off this story. I wrote that piece on your friend Spadaro, but my editors killed it. I sold this story at first because of the carnage—if it bleeds it leads. Now, there's new blood all over the Middle East, and the mid-term elections are coming. Mine safety reform is just not sexy.

Joe Hunter

So, the women are going to have to do this without help from the media. Well, the legendary John L. Lewis rarely got good media and nobody stopped him. I hope those good ladies got what it takes.

Coal Mining Woman (D)
© Hazel Dickens

**Well, we have the babies,
keep the homefires burning bright
Walk the picket lines
in the thickest of the fight
Yes we helped you open doors
and we can help you open more
And if you can stand by me
don't stand in my way**



**D – A – D
G – D
G – D
D – A - D**



Scene 8: A Warning

Deborah Hamner is alone. She hears a knock at the door, goes to it and opens it. John Stemple and Jeff Toler are there.

Deborah Hamner

John, Jeff. How are you? What can I do for you?

Jeff Toler

Good evening Deborah. John and I would like to have a word with you, if that's OK?

Deborah Hamner

Is there a problem?

John Stemple

No. Well, yes. If you don't mind.

Deborah Hamner

Sure. Where are my manners? Please come in. Can I get you something to drink?

Both

No, thank you.

They enter and sit where Deborah indicates. There is a pause.

Jeff Toler

How are you getting' along?

Deborah Hamner

Fine, Jeff. Now, what's this about?

Jeff Toler

We hear that you are organizing a group to challenge the company's account of what happened at the mine.

Deborah Hamner

(A bit apologetic). Some of the women and I have been talking. We're not satisfied and want some answers to our questions.

John Stemple

We all miss Junior, but you know that won't bring him back.

Deborah Hamner

(Still defensive). Of course, I know that. But it is a way to honor him. Maybe we can save somebody else's husband.

Jeff Toler

Don't you think you're just dragging out the pain? Junior Toler was my uncle. He was in that mine too and we all have grieved for him. But, we don't want to stain his memory with some ugly dispute with the company.

John Stemple

Yes, you see, you need to move on from your anger—find personal peace. Your daughter, Sarah, needs you. Others need you.

Deborah Hamner

(Gathering strength). My anger is righteous and my cause is just. I just want...

Jeff Toler

You sound like one of them politicians.

Deborah Hamner

I will sound like what I need to be heard.

John Stemple

What is it you really want?

Deborah Hamner

I told you what I want...what we want. We want to know what happened so, if necessary, there can be changes in the way the mine operates. We've just heard too much about what's wrong at that mine.

John Stemple

We think you're just causing a lot of trouble. People here need the company. This town was built on coal. Do you want us all to lose our jobs?

Deborah Hamner

I don't want to bring down the company, just to raise up the miners.

Jeff Toler

We don't need you to raise us up. We're doing just fine. Of course, we're all upset about the accident, but we know these things happen and we're going to be extra careful in the future to see that it doesn't happen again.

Deborah Hamner

Well, thank you, but that's not good enough.

John Stemple

Look, we appreciate what you've been going through and we're trying to be polite here.

Deborah Hamner

You're telling me what I can't do and I don't appreciate that.

Jeff Toler

You don't know what you're doing. The company has plenty of lawyers, experts and money and we're not going to let you push us around.

Deborah Hamner

Are you threatening me?

Jeff Toler

Deborah, you're making a fool of yourself. We are telling you this is for your own good.

John Stemple

(To Jeff) I think we made a mistake coming here. She isn't willing to listen to reason.

Deborah Hamner

Yes, I think you made a mistake.

The men rise

Jeff Toler

I guess we did. We've been trying to help you—to help all of us—but you don't seem willing to listen. I guess you will have to find out for yourself.

The men leave.

Deborah Hamner

Heaves a sigh and begins to cry softly.

Will You Stand? © Si Kahn

Some people never say what's on their minds

In a hard time you never can find them

Others will stand up the first in the line

And hang on till there's hundreds behind them

Every night , every day,

will you stand for the things that you believe in?

Will you stand, hand in hand, hand in hand with the power of the union?

Scene 9: Investigating the Disaster (Media Center)

Joe Hunter

(To audience). The Democrats protested, but the Republicans held only two short hearings. With Congress taking a pass, West Virginia Governor Manchin called hearings of his own. This one took place in May, near the scene of the disaster.

It was the first public hearing on mine safety since the early 1970s and, more importantly, the first hearing **ever** to involve the families of the victims. What transpired will give you some reason why.

(John Stemple, Jeff Toler, Ben Hatfield and John Collins are seated at a table. The women also are seated, but may rise individually with an inquiry. When a woman prefaces a statement with the name of the person addressed, it should be punched).

Peggy Cohen

(Stands) Can I ask why the families were not contacted and informed about the explosion? I know we've heard over and over that we were. But I personally know that there was nothing on my caller ID and several families...

Pamela Campbell

Mike told us that he didn't even have a phone number for my sister, but yet they called him to work at that number.

Peggy Cohen

Whose responsibility was it to contact the families?

John Stemple

That would be the human resource department. When you start work, you fill out an emergency notification form.

Peggy Cohen

Then why were none of us called? I had to find out from a friend that there was an explosion at the mine. Do you consider that good protocol?

Ben Hatfield

All my information confirms that our people made a good faith effort to reach the families. In some cases, they did not have phone numbers.

Peggy Cohen

Well, **Mr. Hatfield**, when I had to go into the classroom to find out if my dad truly was one of the miners trapped, your man told me what number he called, and that was my father's house, and I was there. And he said he left a message, and there was no message.

Ben Hatfield

I cannot explain that. I don't know what the situation was. (Cohen sits)

Deborah Hamner

Well, can you explain those misleading and hurtful communications? ICG knew within minutes that the men were dead, but let the families wait for three hours before notifying them.

Ben Hatfield

We sincerely regret that. One of the rescue workers mistakenly reported the men were alive. Then we rushed Randall McCloy to the hospital before determining who he was...

Pamela Campbell

I don't think you all realize how hard it was to have our loved ones jerked away from us again, after being told they were alive.

Ben Hatfield

When we got the second report, we held out hope that it was wrong and that the men were just in some comatose state. Frankly, we didn't know what message to deliver until we confirmed the identity of the lone survivor.

Peggy Cohen

In your transcript you said the time went by quickly between the miscommunication and the correction. Three hours. Was that quickly for you? Because while I waited to see whether my dad was dead or alive, it sure wasn't for me.

Deborah Hamner

(Stands) **Mr. Collins**, during the construction of the seals, were any of your MSHA inspectors there watching?

John Collins

Yes.

Deborah Hamner

What percentage of time did you have an inspector there during the construction of the seals?

John Collins

If we looked at the entire inspection, it may be less than one percent.

Deborah Hamner

Less than one percent? So these seals were actually constructed more than 99 percent of the time with no inspector watching?

John Collins

State law does not require us to examine these seals while they're being installed. It's the responsibility of the operator to install those seals in accordance with the approved plan. I personally never saw the seals being constructed.

Deborah Hamner

And we understand from these transcripts that the mortar was actually a soupy mix, some of which had just been thrown in.

John Collins

Yes, as a matter of fact, I've heard that.

Deborah Hamner

But you can't elaborate on that, because you didn't inspect them while they were being constructed?

John Collins

No ma'am. I did not. Perhaps we need a law to require that.

Deborah Hamner

Yes, maybe the law needs changed. (Sits)

Peggy Cohen

(Stands) **Mr. Hatfield**, Terry Helms was one of two fire bosses working the day of the explosion. What violations did Mr. Helms list on his fire boss report?

Ben Hatfield

I believe the fire boss books are with MSHA and not available as a reference.

Peggy Cohen

You guys didn't review your fire boss reports before turning the books over?

Ben Hatfield

(Confers with Stemple). Apparently, we do have a copy and we'll get you a response on that tomorrow.

Peggy Cohen

We've got a problem here. The only other fire boss report was prepared by Fred Jamison, but he claims that his notes were in the pocket of his shirt which was left at the site and never returned.

Deborah Hamner

A claim that we find hard to believe.

Peggy Cohen

Mr. Toler, you are the superintendent, but in your transcript, you said you hadn't reviewed the fire and evacuation plan. Is there a reason why you hadn't?

Jeff Toler

I had reviewed the plan. I was just drawing a blank recalling the details on it. Yes, ma'am, I...

Peggy Cohen

Do you recall them now?

Jeff Toler

Looking right at you, no, I don't. But...

Peggy Cohen

I would think you should know those, and I suggest that you learn them. (Sits)

Jeff Toler

Ma'am, I know the procedures, but I apologize for being just a little nervous here.

Pamela Campbell

(Stands) **Mr. Stemple**, when a carbon monoxide monitor goes off, a miner has to go check to make sure that it is working properly, that there's not a fire. Do I understand that correctly?

Johnny Stemple

Yes.

Pamela Campbell

Why did the dispatcher keep turning the CO monitor off?

Johnny Stemple

It was showing a malfunction.

Pamela Campbell

So do you guys have a lot of faulty CO alarms?

Johnny Stemple

I don't know what a lot is, but it happens.

Pamela Campbell

Maybe you should look into your CO alarm system and maybe it needs **replaced** or something.

Pamela Campbell

Mr. Stemple, what kind of rescuers did you say that you were storing underground now?

Johnny Stemple

One-hour wearable units.

Pamela Campbell

The same ones these men relied on to save their lives?

Johnny Stemple

Yes, ma'am.

Pamela Campbell

So you haven't upgraded to maybe a three-hour or a four-hour unit?

Johnny Stemple

If there's a three-hour or a four-hour that's available, I'm not aware of it ma'am.

Pamela Campbell

Well, I mean, this is the 21st century, I'm sure somebody can make one. Randall McCloy, in his letter, stated that one-third did not work. How do you feel about that?

Johnny Stemple

When you activate the unit, there's no oxygen coming out of it. You have to breathe into it and suck out of it to get oxygen. And you can over breathe these units. You can breathe faster than they can provide oxygen.

Pamela Campbell

Are you telling me that, with all their experience, these miners didn't know how to use those rescuers?

Ben Hatfield

I think all of us at this table believe that Randall McCloy has described accurately what he believes to have happened. But Johnny was simply describing to you what is sometimes a common problem, even with experienced miners. In a traumatic, emotional situation, sometimes people over breathe, and that sometimes makes people think that it's not working.

Pamela Campbell

Well, Mr. Hatfield, this is the 21st century and you should not have to worry whether you're breathing too slow, too fast, or whatever. You should have a rescuer that you push a button and it gives you air if you're trapped in a coalmine.

Ben Hatfield

I would be the first to agree with you that we can do better. That technology hasn't advanced in over a decade and I fully believe that as a result of what we've learned in this tragic accident that it will improve.

Pamela Campbell

I don't really think the technology hasn't advanced. I think it's just a little bit more expensive. I mean, you're going to have to put out some money to update your equipment. (Sits)

Ben Hatfield

What I am saying is that that is the state-of-the-art in the industry. But I believe the industry needs to raise the standard.

Peggy Cohen

(Stands) **Mr. Toler**, I understand that you tried to investigate the explosion and contact the miners. Is that true?

Jeff Toler

Yes. After the CO alarm sounded at 6:30 am, we radioed the mine crews. I did not hear from the Two Left crew so I took three of my men with me to investigate.

Peggy Cohen

What did you find?

Jeff Toler

At the 42 block we detected carbon monoxide, unplugged our jeep and proceeded on foot. By the 58 block, the smoke was so dense, we decided to exit the mine and consult with those more experienced in mine rescue.

Peggy Cohen

When you decided to turn back, how close were you to where the men finally were found?

Jeff Toler

About 2,000 feet.

Peggy Cohen

Were you wearing self-rescuers at the time?

Jeff Toler

No, ma'am. We weren't.

Peggy Cohen

Did you guys ever try to contact the Two Left crew on your walkie-talkie?

Jeff Toler

I forgot to take my radio with me. They're only good for about 500 feet, but I apologize to you that I didn't even have it to try.

Peggy Cohen

Mr. Stemple, what time did you start calling for mine rescue?

Johnny Stemple

About 8:00 am. I made contact with Jim Satterfield of MSHA at approximately 8:30 am and he issued a verbal order preventing anyone from entering the mine.

Peggy Cohen

And when did the rescue crews arrive?

Johnny Stemple

Around 11:00 am, but they had to wait because the CO readings at the portal were too high. At about 4:15 pm the CO began trending downward and the first team entered the mine about an hour later.

Pamela Campbell

Mr. Hatfield, **Mr. Toler** testified that he was 2,000 feet from where those men were found and never under apparatus. And **Mr. Stemple** testified that the rescue crew was on site at 11:00 am, about the time Mr. Toler exited the mine.

Ben Hatfield

About that, yes.

Pamela Campbell

We now know that the men died while the crew waited. So, why didn't the crew go in when they arrived on site?

Ben Hatfield

Well, that gets us back to the heart of the issue in...

Peggy Cohen

I think if the mine rescue workers had their choice they would have entered the mine as soon as their feet hit the ground.

Pamela Campbell

You have human life underground and Mr. Toler tells us he was without apparatus and only 2,000 feet from where they found those men and yet you let an MSHA order keep somebody from going in and rescuing 12 men? That is just unacceptable.

Bennett Hatfield

Sago officials deferred to MSHA's recommendations to wait until CO levels had fallen before entering the mine. We have been disappointed that MSHA has taken a defensive posture regarding the rescue efforts. By their testimony, you might think that they were just waiting for ICG to submit the rescue plans.

John Collins

Wait a minute—MSHA is not responsible if Sago Coal Company doesn't train their people to know what to do in an emergency. Mine owners, not my agency, are in charge of rescue operations. We're there just to make sure the safety plan they submit to us does not put anyone in danger.

Ben Hatfield

My company did nothing wrong. None of the violations at Sago have been linked directly to the explosion. The company provided the miners with all required MSHA training. The seals met federal standards and were built consistent with industry practice.

Deborah Hamner

Then I have one more question. (Pause) Can anyone tell the families what murdered our men? (Pause) Nobody wants to respond to that? That finishes my questioning.

(To audience) George Junior Hamner was my husband. Junior was 54 years old and he had nearly 30 years experience in the underground mines. Junior was a good husband and a good father. Here is the note he wrote to me and our daughter Sara while he was waiting to die:

Junior Hamner

Hi, Deb and Sara.
I'm still OK at 2:40 pm.

(Pause) I don't know what is going on between here and outside. We don't hear any attempts at drilling or rescue. The section is full of smoke and fumes so we can't escape. We are all alive at this time.

(Pause) I just want you and Sara to know I love you both and always have. Be strong and I hope no one else has to show you this note.

(Pause) I'm in no pain but don't know how long the air will last. Tell everyone I'm thinking of them, especially Billy, Marion, Will, Bill and Peg. I love you all.
Junior Hamner, 1/2/06.

Deborah Hamner

Junior was a hard worker and a good provider. And he was a generous man. Even though there has been only the two of us at home all these years, Junior raised huge gardens and gave away bushels of food. That was the sort of thing that made him happy.

Junior loved life. He was most happy when sharing good times with good friends, like the hunting camp that was held on our farm every year. Everybody said he made the best homemade wine in the area—grape, rhubarb, strawberry. In fact, the only thing he enjoyed more than making it was drinking it with friends. Junior was the life of the party and the civility in everyone's lives that were closest to him. My daughter called him her guide, her advisor, her teacher, her strength and her heart. I am working to create a legacy for him, so that his big heart will keep on giving.

Mannington Mine (A)

© Hazel Dickens

**There is a grave way
down in the Mannington mine
There is a grave way
down in the Mannington mine
What were their last thoughts,
and what were their cries
As the flames overtook them,
Way down in the Mannington mine?**

**How can God forgive you?
You know what you've done—
You've killed my poor husband,
Now you want my son**

**A
E - A
A
E - A
A
E - A
A
E - A

D
D - A
A -
E - D - A**

Scene 10: Triumph and Challenge (Mountaineer Café)

Buck Joe and Reggie are at the counter. The five women sit around a table.

Buck Randolph

Reggie, great to have you back with us, if only for the day.

Reggie Wilson

Thanks Buck; and congratulations to you women. The June 2006 federal MINER Act is the first significant piece of mine safety legislation in some thirty years.

Buck Randolph

Bravo ladies! Tell us what you won.

Deborah Hamner

You know Buck, I'm not sure what we won. We talked about no more Sagos and the politicians talked about no more Sagos, but we were speaking different languages.

Buck Randolph

How so?

Deborah Hamner

The Act didn't address how to prevent accidents in the first place. Mostly, it was about trying to save accident victims. It read like a bill that was hacked out in very little time for quick passage. Hey girls, tell these guys.

Pamela Campbell

Companies now have a 15-minute time limit for reporting serious accidents. But the law already called for immediate notification. This just spells out what is meant by immediate.

Deborah Hamner

What a shame that needed to be done.

Peggy Cohen

The companies now must have two rescue teams within an hour's travel time. It took them like three hours to get to Sago and, by then, the gas was too bad to for them to go in.

Pamela Campbell

And each miner gets two hours of emergency oxygen with two hours more stored.

Deborah Hamner

But that ain't the 48 hours Congressman Miller wanted or the rescue chambers we asked for.

Peggy Cohen

And you know what? It turns out the Labor Secretary already had the authority to order more oxygen supplies near the mantrip.

Deborah Hamner

I guess it must have slipped her mind.

Amber Helms

They set a three-year deadline for putting two-way communication in the mines. Congressman Miller wanted to make it 15-months, but the Republicans said that was too fast.

Deborah Hamner

But, since they already have these devices in Australia, why wait at all?

Peggy Cohen

And MSHA said it was going to test the seals and recommend a higher limit. Right now it's 20 pounds per square inch. In Europe, it's 50. The Sago blast was up around 95.

Deborah Hamner

We'll see what number MSHA comes up with.

Pamela Campbell

Deb's right. All of these are halfway steps to limit casualties after an accident, not prevent the accidents in the first place.

Amber Helms

They did raise the fines for violations. Minimum fines are now \$2,000 and they can go all the way up to \$220,000. Plus MSHA can now shut down mines that don't pay the fines.

Joe Hunter

You got all that! Ladies, I owe you an apology. You did get a new mine safety bill, just like you said you would.

Reggie Wilson

Yes, I don't think you women appreciate how much you got. The oxygen packs will cost up to \$20 million; the rescue teams another \$250,000 for each mine. And nobody knows how much for the communications and safety gear.

Deborah Hamner

But these are billion dollar companies and they killed our men. They should spend what's needed to save lives.

Amber Helms

You know the West Virginia report did not point any fingers at anyone. It said the "systems" killed our men—the mine safety systems and mine rescue systems.

Deborah Hamner

The systems? Is that a whitewash or is that real?

Reggie Wilson

I think it's real.

Deborah Hamner

Well then, Reggie, what have they done to change the systems?

Reggie Wilson

Nothing really. There's still no incentive for companies to invest in a professional mine safety system. MSHA's Ray McKinney predicts the companies will continue regarding MSHA as their safety department, playing catch me if you can with the inspectors and writing off the fines as a business expense. That means more Sagos coming; it's only a matter of time.

Pamela Campbell

With Bush making Massey's Richard Stickler the new MSHA head, I would say sooner. He was opposed to new mine safety legislation.

Reggie Wilson

Yeah I know. Neither you nor the top Democrats wanted him. I think the explanation for that is the \$6 million Massey gave to Republican candidates for West Virginia state office.

Deborah Hamner

They better buy them some politicians. Massey leads the state in toxic spills and citations.

Peggy Cohen

Governor Manchin's MSHA chief is no better—a former Console Coal official who called Sago “a well-operated mine.”

Amber Helms

I understand that real reform will be hard under this Administration, but I'm not done yet. I'll be pushing for a ban on the use of those Omega blocks to seal off the mines.

Reggie Wilson

That's the spirit! Every day on Wall Street the big fund managers move the money around, putting pressure on companies to make the biggest profit in the shortest time, regardless of who gets hurt. But this new bill gives you higher ground on which to continue the fight.

Ann Merideth

Deb, you did what I couldn't and I'm grateful.

Deborah Hamner

I understand what you're saying. And I am proud of what we've done. But I can't help but feel that, in the end, they priced out the lives of our men and they came up cheap.

Reggie Wilson

I understand, but right now MSHA and the state are clamping down on Massey over the Aracoma fire. And they hit the Pennsylvania Rosebud Mine with a big \$150,000 fine for wrongful death. And oxygen packs are now being randomly sampled and recalled.

Pamela Campbell

But the companies have gone to court to overturn just about everything in the bill.

Joe Hunter

You can always sue the bastards yourselves.

Deborah Hamner

Some of us are, but that's not what I'm talking about.

Buck Randolph

I know what Deb's talking about. She wants justice.

Deborah Hamner

Yes, I want justice—acknowledge the truth and pay the price.

Buck Randolph

You won't find that in Washington. I was a 19-year-old high school football hero when I lost my leg in Vietnam. Somehow it still hurts—but not as much as my heart. I was a patriot and I saw stuff that killed my spirit. People today may find it hard to believe that there was a time when people trusted politicians to care about them and tell the truth.

Reggie Wilson

It's really not that much different in England.

Buck Randolph

Then I'm sorry for them too. (Pause) I've never been in a mine, but I know many who have and the feeling among the men is not much different than the grunts I served with in 'Nam. This has brought back some bad memories.

Joe Hunter

But my good friend you did survive. And these women will too. And Reggie says there is change we can build on.

Peggy Cohen

And, if we could, how long would that last?

Reggie Wilson

As long as you can keep the pressure on. There's lots of competition for the nation's conscience. Persistence pays. Look at the "9/11" widows. Look at Cindy Sheehan and Military Families Speak Out. You may be discouraged by how short this legislation fell, but, believe me, the companies are stunned that it went this far. And with the Democrats now in control of Congress, there's talk of improving on the MINER Act.

Joe Hunter

You ladies started something. Did you hear that 70 miners picketed District 3 headquarters about the oxygen units and the need for more inspectors? They even asked for a meeting with Richard Stickler.

Deborah Hamner

Now, I understand why they call politics a man's game. People get all pumped up to go in hard and then pull out before everyone's satisfied.

Anne Merideth

Deborah!

Deborah Hamner

Anne, I love you, but grow up. Reggie, is this the best that our system can do and why am I asking an Englishman?

Buck Randolph

Yeah Reggie, I certainly understand the idea of struggle. But all this bureaucratic bullshit makes my eyes glaze over. What is it all about?

Reggie Wilson

Buck, I'm afraid there's always going to be the numbers and fine print. What we need is a new vision of social responsibility to guide our accounting. What if our laws recognized not just the financial shareholders—not just the investors looking for profit—but all the stakeholders in our economy; the workers and the consumers and the taxpayers and the environment we all share?

Joe Hunter

Maybe then, the people's representatives would have to think carefully about what price they put on the life of a miner. (Stepping out to audience). So, did the system murder our men? That's one answer. Production and profit trump safety and health.

But, ultimately, individuals are the ones to take action—for good or ill. And their actions have consequences for others. Without such personal accountability, just blaming the system, is no more helpful than blaming God's will for the tragedies in our lives.

By the following Christmas, the 12 white crosses on the lawn were gone. On the first anniversary of the disaster, some 30 family members tried to hold a vigil at the mine entrance, but ICG turned them away.

By year's end, 47 miners had been killed on the job, 24 of them in West Virginia and all but two in nonunion mines. Also, two Sago Mine safety workers committed suicide, reportedly haunted by the tragedy. John Boni's wife, Vickie, said: "I'm not sure anybody ever gets over it. You live with it every day." That certainly is true for the women survivors of the Sago Mine victims.

Anna McCloy

I guess you all are wondering what happened to Randy. Well, he became kind of a hero. He was there at the signing of the MINER Act and he was very pleased to be a guest starter at NASCAR. But it's still a struggle for him. He can talk to you, but his thinking and speech are still slower than normal and he can't seem to recall things chronologically. He moves better, but he's still in therapy working on his balance and climbing steps.

In April, we got some happy news—our third child, Isaac Martin McCloy, was born. The miracle continues. We don't know what the future holds, but we are so grateful to all the fine medical people who helped Randy to survive the worst. I hope that no other families ever have to go through what our families have gone through.

Terry Helms (behind—no lines)

Amber Helms

My dad was always there for me. And now he's gone. I can't ask his opinion on anything—his favorite singer or his favorite cartoon. We watched lots of those together. I can't talk to him and get a response, because, believe me, I talk to him every day. He's right beside me, right now, looking right over my shoulder. And each one of these loved ones is looking over every family's shoulder.

Fred Ware (behind—no lines)

Peggy Cohen

We lost our dad, Fred Ware, Jr. on January 2, 2006. It comforts me to know he didn't suffer and he wasn't bruised or crushed. I didn't need a note; I just needed to see him. This continues to be one of the most painful things we have ever endured. We all miss him so much.

Junior Hamner (behind—no lines)

Deborah Hamner

Junior was my high school sweetheart and my best friend. I can't believe our story is over. I feel that I've been robbed of our golden years together. Because of this tragedy, my life is never going to be the same. My husband did not have to die.

Ann Merideth

I never got the chance to see my dad at church on the Sunday before he died. I had the flu. After church, he called to see how I was doing. He said,

James Bennett (behind)

Is Sis sick? Guess where I took your mom and grandma to lunch after church. I took them to Burger King! Can you hear? I'm still chewin' on the chili cheese fries! (Laugh). By the way, you need to eat some chicken noodle soup.

Ann Merideth

The very last words my dad said to me was,

James Bennett

Sissy, you know daddy loves you.

Ann Merideth

I always could call upon my dad for advice or a shoulder to cry on. Now that my dad is gone, who do I call on?

Whole Cast

Softly and Tenderly, Jesus is Calling (D)

Will L. Thompson & Company, 1880

(Singing blends in softly and then rises in chorus) *...by the way, you need to eat some chicken noodle soup... The very last words my dad said to me was - Sissy you know Daddy loves you." I always could call on my Dad for advice or a shoulder to cry on*

Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling

Now that my Dad's gone, who do I call on?

Calling for you and for me

See on the portals, He's waiting and watching

Watching for you and for me.

Come home, come home

You who are weary come home

Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling

Calling, O sinner, come home (||: as needed)

Curtain call

"I'll Fly Away"