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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **I WILL SING LIFE: Voices from the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp**

**A Play in One Act**

**Adapted by  
SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER**

**From the book by  
LARRY BERGER, DAHLIA LITHWICK,  
and SEVEN CAMPERS**



**Dramatic Publishing**  
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## Playwright's note:

*I Will Sing Life* is adapted from the book of that name, compiled by Larry Berger and Dahlia Lithwick, former counselors at the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp in Ashford, Connecticut, a nonprofit residential summer camp for children with cancer or other life-threatening illnesses. The book is a collection of creative writing by and interviews with seven of the 900+ campers who attend each year, with additional material by other campers. Permission to use material from *I Will Sing Life* in a stage adaptation has been granted to me by the Teddy Bear Fund, Inc., holder of the book's copyright.

The dialogue, poetry, and stories that follow are the original words of the campers, but they were written or spoken in different contexts. I have woven selections from the book into a single theatrical experience. Occasionally, redundancies have been eliminated or an additional word or phrase has been added for continuity and clarity. Other than these kinds of changes, nothing has been added to the children's dialogue. The counselors are fictional composites of the incredibly generous, dedicated, and talented staff typified by Larry Berger and Dahlia Lithwick.

As indicated in the script, six of the poems have been set to music. For information about the music used in the premiere production, contact composer Ric Averill, c/o Seem-To-Be Players, P.O. Box 1601, Lawrence KS 66044, 785-843-5067; raverill@sunflower.com. The song lyrics are taken from poems written by campers Jason Orcutt ("I Wish"), Katie Martin ("Over and Over"), Corey Svein ("I Got That Teddy Bear Feeling"), Paul Williams ("I Walked in the Woods"), Jonnie Warren ("A Rainbow"), and Tina

**Kenney** (“The Tears on My Face”), also included in the book.

Use of the aforementioned music is optional. You may create your own music for these poems or eliminate the music and speak the poems.

To keep the script a reasonable length, much has been left out. I recommend to all a return to the source:

**I WILL SING LIFE**

**Voices from the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp**  
by **Larry Berger, Dahlia Lithwick, and Seven Campers**  
**Little, Brown and Company**  
Copyright 1992: **The Teddy Bear Fund, Inc.**

For more information about the camp:  
**The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, Inc.**  
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New Haven CT 06511  
203-772-0511  
[www.holeinthewallgang.org](http://www.holeinthewallgang.org)

Special thanks for enlightenment and encouragement to Amie Brockway and Mindy Pfeffer, The Open Eye Theatre, and Jeanne Averill, Lawrence High School, and their casts for early developmental work on this script, and to Jeanne Klein. My gratitude, also, to everyone connected with the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp who helped every step of the way from research to production, including Ray Lamontagne, Larry Berger, Judy Blood, and all the campers, counselors, staff, and volunteers I met during my stay and communicated with afterward; and to all in Springfield who helped make a dream come true, especially Lou Schaeffer and Rick Dines at the Vandivort Center Theatre, Pamela Marquis, the Hulston Foundation, the Community Foundation of the Ozarks, and all the great-hearted folk who participated in and supported the Good Company Theatre for All Ages production.

*I Will Sing Life* was given its premiere production at the Vandivort Center Theatre in Springfield, Missouri, on March 4-7, 1999, by Good Company Theatre for All Ages, a community outreach project of the Drury University Department of Education. Directed by George Cron, the production featured music by Ric Averill, musical direction by Marie Alberti, and the following cast:

Tina . . . . .	BLYTHE CLUTTER
Missy . . . . .	MARIKA TSOLAKIS
Judy (Counselor #1) . . . . .	CARYL BRYAN
Amy (Counselor #2) . . . . .	CINDY CLIFFORD
Rebecca . . . . .	BREAUNA CAUTHRON
Lisa . . . . .	LIZ OAKLEY
Corey . . . . .	CASEY JONES
Shawn . . . . .	JESSE MOOREFIELD

Joanie. . . . . MARGARET THORNTON  
Joe . . . . . CANYON HESTON  
Ada . . . . . LACEY FRAZIER  
Kevin. . . . . BEN HALL  
Katie . . . . . ELISE WEBB

A portion of the royalties from all performances of this script will benefit the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, Inc.



# I WILL SING LIFE:

## Voices from the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp

A play in one act  
for 5 men and 4 women, extras, if desired.

### CHARACTERS

- COUNSELOR #1 . . . experienced and confident about camp  
duties
- COUNSELOR #2 . . . . . less experienced and anxious about  
camp duties
- ADAM JED . . . . . 10-15 years old, very bright,  
uses a wheelchair and/or prosthetic legs
- JOE LOPEZ . . . . . 11-15, open and honest, a sensitive poet,  
has AIDS
- PIA TAYLOR . . . . . mid-teens, outgoing, full of fun,  
African-American, has sickle cell anemia
- COREY SVIEN . . . . . 12-14, mischievous and spiritual,  
has cancer
- SHAWN VALDEZ . . . . . 9-13, shy, loves Nintendo,  
has leukemia
- TINA KENNEY . . . . . mid-teens, tough but kind-hearted and  
loyal, a poet, has cancer
- KATIE MARTIN . . . . . early to mid-teens, outgoing,  
boy-crazy, paralyzed on her left side

Additional CAMPERS, if desired, may divide up dialogue assigned to "ALL" and/or play roles within the dramatized poems and stories (totally without regard to age, gender, etc.). They may also provide music and sound effects, or

simply listen and react. In general, CAMPERS participate *full-out*, maximizing their abilities, i.e., dancing in a wheelchair, if they must, or helping someone else to do so.

If possible, COUNSELORS #1 and #2 should play portable musical instruments, such as guitar, harmonica, fiddle or flute, or an electric keyboardist may underscore scenes and accompany songs. Additional non-speaking, adult COUNSELORS and VOLUNTEERS may be used as helpers, responding to COUNSELOR #1 as “unit leader.”

Playing time: About one hour.

**TIME:** The present. Summer days and nights and imagined times.

**SETTING:** Portions of two Old West-style log cabins—one for boys, one for girls—at the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, and imagined places. Cots, bunk beds, shelves and footlockers may be real or suggested. As COUNSELORS and CAMPERS enter, they fill the space with clothes, toys, camp equipment, craft projects, suitcases, duffel bags, etc. These items become props and costumes throughout the play. Although it should be evident that boys and girls live in separate cabins, the “walls” between them give way as “imagined” scenes flow smoothly from one to the next. Extraordinary props and costumes should not be used for the imaginative scenes. Instead, CAMPERS should mime what they need or create it out of what is already there and a real part of camp.

# I WILL SING LIFE:

## Voices from the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp

AT RISE: *Stage is dark, except for a spotlight on TINA, downstage or in front of curtain, a duffel bag at her side. She speaks directly to audience, with "attitude" and humor.*

TINA. "A Day in the Life" by Tina Kenney

I wake up every morning.

I get up, take a shower,

Throw on some clothes,

Tromp downstairs

And grab that everlasting cup of coffee,

Stare up at the nasty clock and give a nasty sigh.

It's time to go.

I jump in the car,

Pick up Stacy who lives out in the middle of nowhere,

But no one likes to drive to school alone.

I mope between the buses

And read that "after-school soccer is canceled today because the field is flooded."

What? It hasn't rained in three days.

The bell rings,

I kick my locker, as the rest slam one by one and the last of the students graze into class.

I arrive early to school but I'm still late to class.

I go to classes I like,  
I sleep through classes I don't.  
Was that you I bumped in the hallway?  
I don't go along with the dress code,  
And by the way, I have cancer.

*(She picks up duffel bag and exits. Voice of CAMPER is heard singing offstage as lights come up on empty cabins.)*

OFFSTAGE VOICE *(sings "I Wish"—may be more than one voice).*

I wish there was a bird from God  
and got me well  
from His wings on me  
and got me well.

*(As other OFFSTAGE VOICES join in, singing "I Wish" as a round, COUNSELORS #1 and #2 come and go, carrying bedding, sweeping the floor, straightening this and that, listening, smiling, remembering. They interact with each other "outside" the cabins, but are alone with their thoughts while working inside.)*

OFFSTAGE VOICES.

I wish there was a bird from God  
and got me well  
from His wings on me  
and got me well.

COUNSELOR #1 *(with an exuberant sweep of her arm; alone in girls' cabin).* Camp!

COUNSELOR #2 (*alone in boys' cabin, and far less confident*). Camp!

COUNSELOR #1 (*welcoming audience into cabin, as both continue to work*). Crafts, nature, music—

COUNSELOR #2 (*with considerable concern*). —and medication.

COUNSELOR #1. Fishing, swimming, cookouts—

COUNSELOR #2. —and catheters.

COUNSELOR #1 (*to audience, as COUNSELOR #2 continues readying cabin*). Camp is more than a place where sick kids get to be normal. It's also the one place in their lives where it's normal to be sick.

COUNSELOR #2 (*outside cabin, reassuring himself*). They're just kids.

COUNSELOR #1 (*cheerfully*). They're just kids.

COUNSELOR #2. They're just ... kids with life-threatening diseases! What'll they say?

COUNSELOR #1. What they think!

COUNSELOR #2. What'll they do?

COUNSELOR #1. Whatever they feel like doing!

COUNSELOR #2. What'll I say? What'll I do? (*Rushes into cabin; retrieves books.*) Books!

COUNSELOR #1. You brought books?

COUNSELOR #2. On illness—and grief.

COUNSELOR #1. You'll have no time to read them.

COUNSELOR #2. Do we—you know—encourage them to—talk about it?

COUNSELOR #1. "It"?

COUNSELOR #2. Being—sick.

COUNSELOR #1. They'll get to that on their own—when they're ready.

COUNSELOR #2. What about when *I'm* ready?

---

COUNSELOR #1 (*laughs; plays a riff on her guitar.*)  
Ready or not, here they come!

*(COUNSELOR #1 plays music for arriving campers as COUNSELOR #2 hurriedly finishes work and welcomes them. CAMPERS enter, greet one another, exchange hugs, unpack. From this point on, unless singing or speaking as a character in a story, or engaged in their brief interchanges of dialogue, COUNSELORS remain in background, helping wherever needed, providing music, support, a sympathetic ear. ALL often speak to the audience, as to a visitor in the camp, but listen to one another—sometimes with great interest, sometimes casually—and ad lib brief responses to what is said. When anyone performs a poem or story, the response is always enthusiastic applause and encouragement. ALL should use one another's names in these ad libs and expressions of approval.)*

TINA. Camp, sometimes people need it just to get away.

JOE. The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp's the only camp I ever went to.

TINA. Camp is like a giant battery and they issue you a plug of friendship when you walk in the door and everyone gets recharged.

ADAM. I miss my mom.

SHAWN. The first day I got to camp I felt sad and I was scared.

TINA. At first, I thought, "Oh, great, a nice mushy camp where everybody's hugging and kissing. It's gonna be stupid."

PIA. My first summer, I met my counselors, and I thought they must be phony because it was like instant love—and I didn't think anybody could just automatically love you like that, without ever seeing you before. Now I have that instant love thing, too.

SHAWN. I brought Oreos and Pringles, because I was afraid there wasn't going to be enough food. I ate 174 Oreos. I added them up in the package.

KATIE (*casually checking out boys' cabin*). Camp is a place where you learn to live life better because you can do all sorts of things you thought you'd never do again, like fishing and horseback riding.

SHAWN. I wrote some poems and I thought it was fun, so I went back. Sometimes, you write a poem and you don't know what feeling it'll have when it ends.

KATIE. Poems don't come from what you think you're thinking about.

JOE. I learned how to swim underwater.

ADAM. I was too nervous to swim—

PIA. They put a life jacket on me, and I said, "Why do I need a life jacket? I'm not going in."

ADAM. Then one day, it was really, really hot and everyone was in the pool and I just decided I could do it.

PIA. The water was warm. I *love* me some hot water. And I was just splashing and kicking and by the end of that session I kind of knew how to swim.

SHAWN. The best part of camp is woodshop.

PIA. I fight hard all fall and winter so I can have a summer of being a normal kid.

TINA. Hey, I'm not here because I'm rich, I'm here because I need it. If I don't get away from the hospital, if I

don't get away from all those doctors, I'm gonna go insane.

*(ALL applaud and shout agreement.)*

SHAWN. Sometimes, if you tell what you feel instead of leaving your feelings inside, it's better. You get angry, you feel like you're gonna explode. It's like there's a bomb inside. When there's one second left, you express your feelings and you feel better.

COREY. I don't think just having cancer is enough to get me on *Geraldo*. I guess I should commit a crime so it could be: "Cancer Convicts, on the next *Geraldo*."

*(COUNSELOR #1 plays a flourish on the guitar as COUNSELOR #2 moves ADAM DL in his wheelchair. As he begins his story, music and lights indicate a change from everyday life to the imagination. With COUNSELORS' help, CAMPERS act out the story with great enthusiasm, providing music as needed. Though the strains of illness may show at other times, in these imagined moments, CAMPERS never lack for energy.)*

ADAM *(in a voice like that of a prosecuting attorney)*.

Name?

ALL. Imagination.

ADAM. Occupation?

JOE. Thinking.

ADAM. Where do you live?

KATIE. In people's minds—

COREY. Outdoors—

SHAWN. In pages of books—



TINA. In shady pine trees—

PIA. Dead trees that are hunched over—

JOE. And when people first wake up in the morning.

ADAM. Where were you last night?

ALL. In someone's dreams.

ADAM (*in his own voice*). "A Leg with an Ego" by Adam Jed. One day I stay at home because I am feeling sick, but my prosthetic legs decide to go to school without me.

(*Two CAMPERS link arms and become "LEGS."*)

LEG #1. Wearing black leather shoes and tannish pants, they walk through my school—

LEG #2. —go to my desk—

LEG #1. —sit down—

LEG #2. and try to hold a pen with their feet.

LEG #1. It doesn't work, and the paper falls off the desk.

ADAM (*as other CAMPERS and COUNSELORS take roles in the story and mime action as it is told*). My whole class walks in and they all stare at the prosthetics. My teacher, Ms. Chapman, walks in, doesn't believe it, and collapses on the ground. All the kids gather around her like a football team huddling and then one of the kids runs down to tell our principal, Mrs. Robinson.

KID #1 (*to MRS. ROBINSON*). Buzz! Buzz! Buzz!

MRS. ROBINSON (*after reacting to the delivered news*). Recess for the rest of the day!

ADAM. During recess my prosthetics play kickball. The person who's in charge of recess, Mrs. Rosenberg, comes by the kickball field, looks at the person who is kicking, and realizes—

MRS. ROSENBERG. It's just a pair of legs!

ADAM. She starts to run away, but she's so dizzy that she hits her face right into a fence—and gets knocked out. The students are sent home for the day because the teachers all fainted and there was no one to watch the kids at recess.

LEG #1. So the legs get on the bus and put down their bookbag—

LEG #2. —but one of the kids tells the bus driver—

KID #2. The prosthetics don't have a seat belt on!

ADAM. She walks back, looks at the legs, and faints. So now there's no one to drive the kids home and they have to go to Mrs. Robinson.

KIDS (*to MRS. ROBINSON*). Blah! Blah! Blah!

ADAM. She calls our parents, but when my mom hears that my legs are at school without me, she faints.

(*CAMPER as MOM cries out and faints.*)

LEG #1. My prosthetics walk home—

LEG #2. —go into the house—

LEG #1. —up the stairs—

LEG #2. —and sit down on my bed.

ADAM. When I see them, I faint. (*He faints.*)

LEG #1. So the legs drive me to the hospital.

LEG #2. One leg pushes the pedal.

LEG #1. The other leg turns the steering wheel.

LEG #2. There's a whole hospital emergency room filled with all the people who have fainted.

ALL WHO HAVE FAINTED (*a loud moan in unison*).  
Oooooooooohhhhhhhh!

ADAM. Later, the prosthetics come in to visit me.

LEG #1. They see me walking around on another pair of prosthetics.

LEG #2. They think that I'm impersonating them!

ADAM. And they get confused—

ALL (*as LEGS faint*). —and faint!

*(Music ends; lights return to normal. CAMPERS break out of story, clapping, cheering, and hugging ADAM. BOYS and GIRLS return to "cabins," replace props and costumes, speaking as they work.)*

SHAWN. One of the things I hate the most is when I get Very Goods at school and I don't deserve them. And it makes me mad when kids pretend they can't catch me when we play tag, because I know they can.

TINA. People expect that just 'cause you're sick you've got to be some kind of angel. Ha! Sophomore year I don't remember a day I didn't get detention.

SHAWN. Janet, she sits behind me at school. She's my friend and I like her, but she always wants to take care of me and I already have a mother.

COREY. A lot of kids and adults with cancer are embarrassed—they want to wear wigs because they've lost their hair—but I think just forget about it and have fun with it. If I'm bald, I write stuff on my head. Once I wrote—

ALL (*pointing to COREY's head*). "Touch this and die!"

*(NOTE: When playing people in another character's real-life conversation—as opposed to the imaginative stories—actors speak their lines directly forward, to the audience.)*

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