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JANE CHAMBERS AWARDS

MAIN CONTEST WINNER 2020

HOW WE SURVIVED (3W, 2M) by Pauline David-Sax follows the past and present day life of Freyda, a German-Jewish refugee who, along with her husband Werner, made the decision to leave Germany in 1939 when hostilities towards the Jewish community were beginning to rise. The couple immigrated to New York City, leaving behind Werner's parents who chose to stay in Germany. Upon arriving in America, Freyda and Werner discover their fight for survival did not end at escaping Germany. They must navigate the financial, social, and cultural challenges of living in the United States as immigrants. The play opens with a video of present-day Freyda, now 89, sitting down for an interview with an unseen character. In this interview Freyda shares her life story, beginning at her birth, and explains that from the very start, she was always determined to live. The play then moves fluidly through different time periods in Freyda's life, in which we meet Werner at different ages as well as her daughter and granddaughter, who are both strong, intelligent women making their way in the world. Her daughter Rosalie urges her to receive reparations now being offered by Germany, but Freyda does not like to dwell in the past. Later we get to know her granddaughter, Dana, an independent college student wisely following her heart. Freyda's video interviews are interspersed among these and other key scenes that tell the story of who she is, transporting the interviewer and the audience back in time with her to some of the most pivotal moments in her life: when Werner asked Freyda to move to America with him, when he buys Freyda her beloved rubber tree, when Freyda discovers that she is pregnant, and tragically, when Werner discovers that his parents committed suicide in Germany. *HOW WE SURVIVED* transitions seamlessly through these moments illuminating the untold tragedies of Freyda, Werner, and countless other survivors like them. *HOW WE SURVIVED* illustrates the perspective of another kind of survivor of the holocaust, one who was able to physically immigrate, but could not escape the psychological trauma of the event. David-Sax accomplishes this joyously by celebrating the tenacity and joie de vivre of Freyda, who not only survives, but thrives in the legacy of her daughter and granddaughter.

Pauline David-Sax is a playwright, children's book author and educator living in Brooklyn, NY. Full-length plays: *How We Survived*, *Exposure*, *Illusion of Control*, *Goldfish Have No Memory*, and an upcoming play (title TBD) about the female bunnies from *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Pauline's primary interest as a writer is in (re)constructing missing or neglected perspectives in order to tell more complex stories. Her work has been read/performed at Nora Salon South & The Nora Salon (Nora's Playhouse), The Bechdel Group, Tuesdays@9 (Naked Angels), and the Detention Series (ESPA/Primary Stages). In addition to winning the 2020 Jane Chambers Prize, her play *How We Survived* was also selected for the 2020 Players Club of Swarthmore New Play Festival and named a finalist for the 2019 HRC Showcase Theatre national playwriting contest (both readings currently on hold due to Covid-19). Her play *Exposure* was a finalist for the 2018 Todd McNerney Playwriting Award. You can read more about Pauline and her work on the [New Play Exchange](#).

2020 RUNNERS-UP

DOWN IN THE HOLLER by Val Dunn (4 W): In a cabin off the Appalachian trail we meet a newly engaged couple: Juniper and Blake. Juniper is a free-spirited artist who has spent months renovating this cabin, eager to be living there with her girlfriend Blake. Blake on the other hand, is a practical and detail-oriented environmental rights lawyer, ready to settle down.

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Suddenly, Maeve, appears, having wandered into the cabin, unnoticed by Juniper and Blake. Maeve is a woman who “just looks like she walked off a cliff”, and startles Blake with her appearance, nonetheless she offers Maeve assistance, offering to drive her to the hospital. As Maeve and Blake continue to speak, Maeve begins asking rather intrusive questions, specifically regarding Juniper and Blake’s love life. It becomes clear to Blake that this is no ordinary stranger, but someone with a deep past with Juniper. Eventually the mysterious Maeve confronts Juniper and we learn that 10 years ago Maeve and Juniper built a life together in this cabin as lovers. Soon, tensions between Maeve and Blake escalate until they get into a physical altercation, which Juniper tries to stand in between. As soon as Juniper intervenes, the present transforms into the past. The chic, immaculate, newly renovated cabin inhabited by Juniper and Blake transforms into the shabby, run-down cabin where Maeve and Gin (Juniper’s former-self) built a life together years ago. The play shifts the focus to Gin and Juniper’s love story. The dynamic between the two couples are vastly different. Blake is the complete opposite of Maeve. Maeve is carefree, unorganized, spontaneous, unattached to material wealth, yet relies heavily on Gin for financial support. Although initial scenes between Gin and Maeve illustrate the passion, love, and intimacy that existed between them, eventually Gin’s frustration with Maeve becomes clear. Gin wants a “real” home with security and basic amenities, Maeve lives on the edge of poverty with no thought to “building a better life” and raising her class station. Gin’s frustration instigates a final fight between the two, which ends with Maeve leaving Gin alone in their cabin, telling herself that she knows Maeve will return home to her someday. We return to the present. Maeve is gone, Gin has returned to being Juniper, but is still faced with an ultimatum. Will she hang on to the past and attempt to recreate her life with Maeve as her more authentic working class self? Or will she choose to end that chapter of her life and create new memories with Blake? *DOWN IN THE HOLLER* beautifully addresses the topics of love, loss, past influence on our current lives, and individual transformation. The scenes from present to the past flow seamlessly together through exciting scene changes, and utilization of movement.

Val Dunn al Dunn is a writer/deviser who creates plays, performance art, and rituals. Her work possesses a strong sense of place and tackles issues of feminism and queerness while pushing against the limitations of form. Val’s writing has been presented at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, the Philadelphia Fringe Festival, Philly Theatre Week, Philly SoLow Fest, and You Can’t Fail @ Tattooed Mom. She is a member playwright of InterAct Theatre Company’s Core Playwrights, Azuka Theatre’s New Pages, Writers on the Rocks, and an alumna of the Foundry @ Play Penn. Val’s work has been supported by Play Penn, the Orchard Project, Azuka Theatre, Signal Fire, Centrum Arts, the Bearded Ladies Cabaret, SANDBOX, and Washington College. Val holds a B.A. with honors in drama and English from Washington College where she received the Stewart Award for Drama, The Mary Martin Prize, The Jude & Miriam Pfister Poetry Prize, The William W. Warner Prize for Writing on the Environment, The Literary House Genre Fiction Prize, and was a finalist for the Sophie Kerr prize in Literature. Val currently splits her time between Philadelphia, PA and Bristol, UK. Additional projects include *Now More Than Ever*, *Johnny Depp: a Retrospective on Late-Stage Capitalism*, [home.body], *Space|Place|Nonplace*, *I Know the Wind for the Things It Touches*, and *The Beauteous Majesty of Denmark*. <http://valdunn.com>

NICOLE CLARK IS HAVING A BABY (3W, 1M) by Morgan Gould: Nicole Clark, a fat woman in her 30s, dreads visiting her mother Helen due to her passive aggressive behavior and persistent body shaming. The play opens with Nicole, accompanied by her incredibly supportive fiancée Robert, reluctantly visiting her mother in order to attend her childhood friend, Amy’s, baby shower. Nicole

has recently found out that she is pregnant but is determined not steal the spotlight from Amy's, so she and Robert choose to keep it a secret from Amy and Helen. As the play unfolds, Helen and Nicole interact as mothers and daughters do and the full extent of Helen's fatphobia is revealed. Although Helen is now thin woman, we learn that she used to be, and lived most of her life, as a fat

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woman. Nicole struggles to deflect her mother's barbs and remain centered, but Helen is relentless. Throughout the course of the visit, as Helen's abusive comments increase in directness, Nicole reaches her breaking point. Over dinner with Helen, Robert, and Amy, Nicole drops her pregnancy bombshell. When Helen, predictably, reacts with concerns that Nicole is too fat to be a healthy mother, Nicole finally confronts Helen about the years of emotional abuse and fat shaming she has endured from her. *NICOLE CLARK IS HAVING A BABY* tackles the real and heartbreaking truth of the psychological effect of fatphobia, and how it can take shape between different relationships. The exchanges that Nicole and Helen share are both incredibly witty, and heartbreakingly realistic. *NICOLE CLARK IS HAVING A BABY* exposes the very real psychological danger of 'diet talk' and how they can affect a fat person's psyche.

Morgan Gould 's play *NICOLE CLARK IS HAVING A BABY* (2020 Kilroy's List) was set to premiere as part of the 44th Humana Festival at Actors Theatre of Louisville with Morgan directing. The production was cancelled due to the coronavirus after only 5 performances. Her other plays include *I WANNA FUCKING TEAR YOU APART*, a Beatrice Terry/ Drama League Award Winner that had its world premiere at Studio Theatre in Washington, DC in February 2017 (with Morgan directing). It was nominated for a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play, and DC Metro Arts said that Morgan's work "shows every bit as much promise as Edward Albee's early work, arguably more," and *JENNIFER WHO IS LEAVING* (Finalist – O'Neill), *ALL THE STUPID BITCHES* (Finalist - O'Neill, workshop at Playwrights Center, IAMA Theatre) and *THREE FAT SISTERS* (Finalist – Sundance, Workshop, Cutting Ball Theater and Z Space in San Francisco). Morgan is a current Interstate 73 Member at P73, Ingram New Works fellow at Nashville Rep, a member of Ensemble Studio Theatre, a Yaddo Colony Fellow, a MacDowell Colony Fellow, and an alumnus of the Dramatists Guild Fund Playwriting Fellowship, The Women's Project Lab, the Civilians R+D Group, Target Margin Lab, Lincoln Center Director's Lab, SDC Observership Program, the BAX AIR Residency, Playwrights Horizons Directing Residency and New Georges Writer/ Director Lab. She has previously held staff positions at Playscripts, Inc., Lark Play Development Center, Cape Cod Theatre Project, and was the Associate Artistic Director of Young Jean Lee's Theater Company, where she co-created *UNTITLED FEMINIST SHOW* (BAC/PS 122). Morgan is also the Artistic Director of Morgan Gould & Friends – her theater company with 9 actors, 3 designers, and a filmmaker (www.morgangouldandfriends.com). Morgan holds a B.A. in Directing from Fordham College at Lincoln Center, and a M.F.A. in Playwriting from Brooklyn College. She is currently working on her new play *HONESTLY, I'VE NEVER WANTED TO BASH ANYONE ON THE HEAD AS MUCH AS I DO RIGHT NOW* and developing half hour series with Amazon, Apple TV, and HBO Max.

HONORABLE MENTION

CATCH (2W, 2M) by Lara Miller: *CATCH* opens on Susannah, a home birth midwife, delivering her own baby, guiding herself through birth with control and poise, much to the amazement of her husband George. Susannah is incredibly passionate about her work and has no intention of exchanging her career for motherhood, yet work arrives much faster than she was anticipating when she receives a visit from famous actress, McKayla Robbins. McKayla Robbins, a high profile

black actress is heavily pregnant and asks Susannah if she will serve as her midwife, as she feels unsafe giving birth at a hospital. Initially, Susannah declines but McKayla pleads, explaining that “hospitals are a death camp for black women,” as maternal mortality is four times more likely for black mothers. She firmly believes that home birth midwives are the answer to black mothers’ fears, and wants to make a public statement with her birth by working with a midwife. Susannah, moved by McKayla’s plea, agrees. On the night of McKayla’s birth, Susannah rushes to the scene, confident and prepared; in twelve years of practice, she has never lost a baby. But her perfect

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record ends with McKayla’s delivery. In the days following the death of McKayla’s baby, the story goes viral in the media and instigates a political conversation about the legitimacy and safety of midwives fueled further by McKayla’s public statement, claiming that Susannah violated her and her husband’s trust, and that she was wrong to think that midwives were the solution to black mother and infant mortality rates. In an effort to save her career, the grieving Susannah puts out a statement of her own, and chooses to use the publicity as an opportunity to defend midwives credibility and legitimacy. In the midst of Susannah’s grief and shame, she begins to unknowingly distance herself from her husband and her daughter. While at rock bottom, Susannah reconnects with McKayla, and they begin to process their grief together, and become a support system for each other. *CATCH* addresses one of the many hidden instances of systematic racism: the bias against black mothers within a medical setting. It is a bold, breathtaking story that illustrates the numerous and complex ways we process grief and the individual growth it creates.

Lara Miller Lara Miller is a playwright living in San Francisco, CA. Her full-length play *Catch* was a 2020 semi-finalist with the Eugene O’Neil National Playwrights Conference. Her short play *Sketches of Danae* was the 2019 recipient of “Best Script” and “Best Overall Short” with the Bartell Theatre awards. Her other works have been produced at the Playwrights Center of San Francisco and Bricolage Production Company in Pittsburgh, PA. She is co-founder of Fieldwork Creations, a non-profit organization that turns academic research data into theatre for presentation at conferences, fundraisers, and community events. With Fieldworks, she has worked with artists to present data in Rwanda, Kenya, Canada, and the United States. She worked previously as an actor at regional theatre companies throughout the country and continues to be a proud member Actor’s Equity Association. She holds a BA from NYU, an MS from UCSF, and a certificate from the Stella Adler Studio of Acting.

STUDENT CONTEST WINNER 2020

ABSENTIA by Olivia Matthews: After living in the secluded Florida woods for eight years with only her overprotective father and pet rabbit Robyn, 20-year-old Esther Harris longs to be reunited with her long-lost mother. Meanwhile, only miles away, Diana Baines gathers with her community to mourn the loss of her young daughter, Neoma. When Esther’s father kills her beloved Robyn, she flees from their cabin and returns to her hometown, turning Diana’s grief on its head. Soon, their lives collide as Esther learns more and more of how everyone around her has moved on in her absence. And as she is haunted by a mysterious death from her path, Esther must fight to reclaim her space and identity in her old home.

STUDENT HONORABLE MENTIONS

BURY THE REST by Skye Robinson Hillis: Following the death of their 17-year-old daughter Lucy in a mass high school shooting, friendly exes Margot and Colin find themselves at a moral impasse. Colin's position as a Republican U.S. Senator makes it difficult for Margot and the rest of the family to reconcile the root of their grief with his continued support of the NRA. As Margot and Colin intertwine themselves during the grieving process, their relationship takes a dark turn that leaves Colin's new wife Laura on the outside and their remaining daughter Samantha to navigate this brave new world on her own. Each member of the family tumbles deeper into the cavernous rabbit hole of devastation, loneliness, and anger while Lucy, inexplicably caught between the living and the dead, must confront the truths of her short life while facing the terrifying looming reality

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that is her death. As they navigate the intimacies of their reformed relationship and rebuild themselves as a family, it may in fact be Lucy who decides their fate.

DIGITAL SAPPHISM by Alyssa Sileo: Elise is enjoying her winter break alone in the house, using her new Amazon Alexa to tend to her Instagram account (one of the most famous anonymous sapphic meme pages), and trying to not think too hard about how her parents are in Jamaica on a Christian conversion therapy mission trip. When her mom texts that a tropical storm has delayed their return flight, Elise celebrates with Alexa, triggering the machine's Amazon Ally Mode. Freaked out, Elise endeavors to disable the feature and protect her closetedness until her crush Stella texts, asking to hang out—with a winking emoji. Alexa offers to help Elise determine Stella's intention and sexuality through a series of digital analyses, an emotional and humorous adventure that pushes Elise to demonstrate courage and affirm how identity is much more complicated than an algorithm could ever be. Bordering reality, fantasy, and our coming future, *Digital Sapphism* is the product of a young queer writer's passion for and critique of the modern sapphic style, and how this global culture has flourished thanks to a little bit of WiFi. The play is brimming with comments on surveillance capitalism, the increasing visibility of queer culture, the young sapphic experience, and machine tone beeps.

THE JANE CHAMBERS AWARD recognizes new feminist plays and performance texts created by women and genderqueer writers for the stage that present a feminist perspective and contain significant opportunities for female performers. We welcome plays that experiment with form and/or that feature non-binary characters. This annual award, established in 1984, is given in memory of lesbian playwright Jane Chambers who, through her plays *A LATE SNOW*, *LAST SUMMER AT BLUEFISH COVE*, *MY BLUE HEAVEN*, *KUDZU*, & *THE QUINTESSENTIAL IMAGE*, became a major feminist voice in American theatre. We understand feminism to refract across diversity, welcome experimentation, and often honor works that stage under-represented voices on the stage. Sponsored by the Women and Theatre Program (WTP) with the Association for Theater in Higher Education, the Jane Chambers winner receives \$1000 & a reading of the winning play at ATHE. Guidelines for submission—and our archive of recent winners—can be viewed at www.athe.org/wtp/. We rely upon private donations to fund this Award. This year's winning play— *HOW WE SURVIVED*—rose from about 350 submissions. Honored plays suit a variety of theatre missions and feminist perspectives. The Winning Student Play—*T?*—receives \$250 and a reading at the WTP Conference.

In 2020, the Main Contest was stewarded by Jen-Scott Mobley with the assistance of Maya Roth, and involved twenty feminist readers from across the U.S. in three rounds of adjudication.

Maya and Jen-Scott are co-editors of a two-volume anthology of recent winning plays to increase production and recognition of the impressive works the Award honors. The first volume: *Lesbian and Queer Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize* was released by NoPassport Press is available on Amazon. The second volume (*Cross-Cultural Plays from the Jane Chambers Prize*) is forthcoming in late 2020.

The 2020 Student Contest was coordinated by Megan Stahl.

For more information on the Awards, or to reach the coordinators, refer to the WTP Website.

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