



**Sample Pages from
Puzzle Pieces**

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PUZZLE PIECES

A MONOLOGUE-BASED
PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Krista Boehnert



Puzzle Pieces

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Characters

JAMIE: 17 years old

VICKI: 17 years old

TROY: 16 years old

ERIN: 17 years old

JEN: 16 years old

Set

The set consists of eight acting boxes, in the shape of 3-D puzzle pieces. The boxes are strewn around the stage.

Author's Note

The play can be performed in a variety of ways. The use of lighting and music can assist in creating smoother transitions. Having all of the actors on stage for the entire production, in silhouette or in tableaux, during or between scenes is another way to stage this piece.

There can be interaction between the actors or total isolation with each actor limited to their own lighted area of the stage.

Production History

Puzzle Pieces was originally performed in the University of Windsor's Playfest '96, directed by Kara S. Boehnert. The original cast included:

JAMIE: Stephen Murray

VICKI: Gwyneth Gorman

TROY: Ryan Cleary

ERIN: Melanie Mulcaster

JEN: Jennifer Arno

The stage is dark as JAMIE, TROY, JEN, VICKI and ERIN enter. JAMIE is dressed in ripped jeans and a football jersey. He is athletic looking and is carrying a football. TROY enters in jeans and a T-shirt. He is carrying a toy airplane. JEN enters carrying a diary and is wearing a fashionable dress. VICKI enters carrying a rag doll. She is wearing tight jeans, a fitted shirt, and her boyfriend's jacket. ERIN comes in with a security blanket. She is wearing blue jean overalls and a brightly coloured T-shirt.

Once all the actors are on stage, they each place their object inside one of the puzzle pieces/acting boxes. When the monologue regarding their special object occurs, the actors can reach into the puzzle piece and perform the monologue with the object.

All but VICKI assume a position on one of the acting boxes. A spotlight shines down centre stage. VICKI enters the spotlight and begins.

Scene 1

VICKI: When I was little, my family and I had put together this huge puzzle. It took us weeks to finish it because there were so many pieces. The puzzle took over our kitchen table and we were all so proud of ourselves for having put it together. We liked it so much that we didn't take it apart for a long time. It just stayed there, spread out on the table.

One day when I came home from school, my brother and I were horsing around in the kitchen. He pushed me and I fell against the table, knocking the entire puzzle onto the floor. I started to cry. I scrambled to find all the pieces and put it back together again, but I couldn't. Some of the pieces were lost forever under the refrigerator, and I couldn't get the rest of the pieces to fit together properly. I just had a pile of mixed up puzzle pieces.

You know, that's kind of like us. The puzzle. We're made up of all these little pieces that are supposed to make one big picture. But, pieces can get lost, or don't fit together quite right, and still we try to make a picture of ourselves anyway.

Scene 2

JEN: Everybody's got a story. Sometimes they end up sad, or happy. A lot of people think that because we're young, we can't possibly have any relevant stories to share yet, but we do.

TROY: We've got hopes and dreams and fears, just like everyone else. There's times when we've been disappointed and times when we've discovered unexpected victory. It's usually the surprises in life, whether good or bad, that we remember.

ERIN: We're going to talk about a lot of things. Some will make you laugh. Some will make you cry. The important thing is to listen, and to hopefully understand.

VICKI: Our stories are honest and from the heart. They're stories we have to share so that others can experience them. But beware, honesty can hurt.

JAMIE: Our stories are all pieces of one big puzzle. We try to fit it all together to get a picture we can understand. That's what we are, that's what everyone is, a bunch of mixed up puzzle pieces.

Scene 3

TROY: Twenty years. Twenty years they've been together and now they're calling it quits. Au revoir. Pulling the plug. So long sucker. And for me, it's the most bizarre thing because I don't ever remember my parents arguing with each other. In fact, they were always pretty quiet. They didn't really talk to each other at all.

Not until recently that is. Now they're talking a lot, about everything. They argue about whether at the family Christmas party in '89 Uncle Roy was really drunk or just pretending to be. They argue about where their first official date was and what the other was wearing. They argue about who will get the house, the kids, the car. They argue about whose fault it is that the marriage is over, and who knew it was going to end first.

And Mom blames Dad for having a girlfriend. And Dad blames Mom for never letting him know she loved him. My sister and my mom both blame me just for being a guy and tell me I'm just like my father. And I blame my parents for acting so juvenile and using their kids as pawns in their game to "equally split the shared assets."

I look around at school and for the longest time I was the only kid whose parents hadn't divorced. And now, I look at all the couples in the street and think, "How long will it last?" Two years? Ten? Twenty? Can you ever be sure when you fall in love it will be forever? Will you wake up one morning after twenty years and decide you want someone else?

My parents have moved from big complaints to little ones. He

slurps his soup. Always has, always will. It is so embarrassing. Her makeup takes up all the counter space in the bathroom. A guy can't even find a spot for his toothbrush. And somewhere, in all the fighting, they forgot that at one time they did love each other. Thought it would last forever. Had two kids to show their love for each other.

And now, the house is full of things marked his or hers, a couple of devastated kids, and two wedding bands sitting abandoned on their night table. Twenty years reduced to that.

Scene 4

ERIN: Where will I be in a year? Geez. That's a tough question. I don't really know if anyone can answer that. I mean a year is a long time, and a lot of stuff happens. It's hard to say for sure where you'll be in twelve months.

Don't get me wrong. Not everything changes. I mean sometimes you can take a glimpse of your life and six months later you're still doing the same thing. Just going around in circles like riding around forever on a big Ferris wheel. You just keep making circles but you never really get anywhere.

It was easier when we were younger to answer that question. The relatives would come over for the annual summer barbecue and one would ask, "So, what are you up to this year?" And immediately we would be able to answer with something like "I'm going into grade four. It's going to be great. I'm a big kid now!"

But now, now somehow we're supposed to decide what we're going to do with the rest of our lives. Will it be university? Or work? Will I stay home or maybe go away? There's so many decisions, so much uncertainty, and everyone seems to flounder around trying to come up with future plans.

For me, it's not so much the decisions, or the instability. It's looking around at everyone else settling for something that's secure and comfortable. You see, in my experience, there are two kinds of people: the dreamers and the dream catchers.

Now the dreamers are nice people and all. They've got their big aspirations of great things they want to do, but when it comes time for them to take the plunge, to go for it, they say, "Wait! What am I doing? How am I going to support myself? What if I don't make any money at this? I must be crazy!" So they settle. They get the financially secure job, they marry, and have the

2.5 children. The “perfect” life. They give up their hopes for something more concrete and a few nice daydreams.

Now the dream catchers on the other hand are a totally different group of people. They take the plunge. They go for it, they give it their all. I’m not saying they’re always successful. Sometimes they fail and they have to move on. But the point is they tried. When they are old and looking back at their life they can say, “I did that” instead of sitting around wondering what might have been.

So where am I going to be in a year you ask? I can’t really say. I could tell you where I’d like to be, but I don’t know if that is going to happen yet. One thing I can tell you, without a shadow of a doubt, is that I am going to be out there, and I’ll be trying to catch my dream.

Scene 5

JEN: You can always tell when someone has just started to fight for something. They get struck down and immediately they’re on their feet again to take the next blow. They even try to defend themselves.

But then, as the fight goes on, they get up more slowly, deciding whether to get up at all. Up they go and down again, and they no longer take any swings themselves.

And then there’s that final fall, where you just give up and stay down. And still the hits come. But it doesn’t matter anymore because you’ve been defeated and you just lie there. And you stay down.

Scene 6

TROY: Why do girls always go to the washroom in groups? Like when you’re on a double date and one girl says she has to go to the ladies’ room, the other one always gets up to go too. And girls, we guys aren’t completely stupid. We know you’re going there so you can talk about us. About whether you’re gonna try and sneak out of the bathroom window instead of finishing the date. Or if you like us, or whatever.

Guys would never do that. Have you ever seen guys heading to the can in groups of two or three? NO. We’re up front. We may not say exactly how we feel, but if we didn’t like you, you wouldn’t have been asked on the date in the first place.

Scene 7

JAMIE: Pressures. I guess you could say that's how this all started.

Pressures coming at me from all these different directions. Pressures I couldn't handle. Pressures I couldn't take. It's rough, you know? Trying to be the star of the football team, to get good grades, work... friends... And don't get me wrong, 'cause most of the time things are good. Things are great... But then, I don't know... everything starts to collapse on you. You miss a game, you're late for work... and Sheri...

I just needed something to slow down the world for a minute. Stop all the noise in my head. And my parents' liquor cabinet was just sitting there right in front of me. Instant solution...

I'm not used to being this out of control. I've usually got a handle on things. Just throw a problem at me, and I could solve it. *(pause)* Maybe I got tired. Maybe a lot of things. All I know is that for awhile there, it makes me forget. And there's this calm... and the noise in my head... it stops. And if I sit still, I can hear my heartbeat and I know that I'm still here. Still in the game. Still a player... still alive.

The coach told me if I show up drunk to another game, I can kiss the team good-bye. No heartfelt advice. No concern about my new habit. No, "Are you OK?" Just the old "shape up or ship out" speech. Talk about a support system...

And he's right, you know. You can't run if you can't see straight. And you sure as hell can't score if you don't know which way your team is going... Maybe that's what I need. To figure out which way I'm going...

Problem is, I can't see too straight right now, so it's pretty hard to decide which way to run.

Scene 8

VICKI: You want to know what the worst part is? Not being able to remember. It's like there's just this big blank in your memory. A big one year blank.

The funny thing is it will come back to you when you least expect it. Maybe it's a face in the street that triggers the memory, or some song on the radio. I don't know. Then it all comes rushing back and plays its sad story out for you, like a dream almost.

Yeah, a dream. Because a dream is just the other side of a nightmare.

Scene 9

JEN: What is it with guys and phones? I think they have some sort of innate fear of dial tone. Is it so difficult to pick up the receiver and punch in seven numbers? NO. Then how come a guy always says, “Hey, I’ll call you” and they never do. I should qualify that. The guy you want to call never does. And the guy you don’t want to call is way too in touch with his phone skills. I mean couldn’t the phone instructions have been distributed more evenly throughout the male population? Is that so much to ask?

Scene 10

ERIN: You know what I hate? When I’m shopping in the mall, and every store I go into the sales clerk watches me like a hawk. They think just because I’m a teenager I’m going to shoplift or break something. Come on, give me a little credit.

JAMIE: I can’t stand it when it’s my night to have the car and my brother has driven it before me, because he always leaves the gas tank empty. He does it on purpose too, knowing that I’ll be driving somewhere with my date and halfway there the car will stop. And we’ll have to get out and walk. He’s so immature!

VICKI: My parents hate my boyfriend. They say we spend too much time together. My mom always tells me I should spend more time with my friends. She says I shouldn’t get so serious ‘cause I’m still so young. But we love each other and we want to be together, so why can’t she just stay out of it?

JEN: I don’t like it when teachers at school tell you you aren’t trying hard enough. “You’re not applying yourself.” And they think you’re slacking off. But what if you really are working hard and you just aren’t getting good marks? Shouldn’t that count for something?

TROY: My friends tease me so bad about my part time job. So what if I dress up like a clown and wander around the mall giving out balloons to kids? OK, I’ll admit it’s embarrassing, and I don’t find the red nose all that comfortable, but it’s a job. And it’s money. At least I don’t still have to ask my parents for allowance like they do.

Scene 11

TROY: They say that your life flashes before your eyes when you're about to die, but that's not true. It's not your whole life you see, just the parts you hate. You see your regrets and failures, and for a fleeting second you wonder if anyone will care that you're dead. That's how it happens, don't believe any of the crap other people tell you because it's not true.

I know why they lie, though. When someone asks what you saw in that moment, do you really want to admit you saw regret and failure? No way. So instead they make up that story about feeling all peaceful and seeing a white light. But that's not how it happened with me.

I got into a serious car accident, and almost died. I saw before me all the things I never did. All the people I ever yelled at. The bad stuff. And then, all of a sudden you're so glad you're alive. You start to believe in God and heaven. But the weird thing is that it doesn't last. After you get over the shock and the injuries, you're right back to how you were before. If it were to happen again you'd still see the same pictures of failure.

It's too bad these experiences don't permanently change us. Maybe if we became better people we would see our family and achievements in those final moments. If that's the kind of life that flashed before my eyes, the only regret I would have, is dying.

Scene 12

JAMIE: When I was little, my older brother used to torment me. All older siblings do it. It's like human nature to make life miserable for your kid brother. And older siblings know they have the power 'cause when we're little we look up to them. Believe everything they say. Without questioning their logic.

That's how my brother convinced me I could fly. "If Superman can do it, so can you, Jamie. I used to be able to fly when I was your age, but it wears off by the time you turn ten." So I jumped off the garage and spent 6 weeks in a cast. Brothers.

For the entirety of my childhood, I never got \$200 for passing GO when playing Monopoly. I never got to make up the rules when we invented games – rules, which coincidentally benefited him. And never, ever, no matter how many arm wrestling matches we had, I never got the prize in the breakfast cereal box.

Us younger siblings had power too, though. One quick, “Mom! Brad hit me!!!” and we had instant parental allies. “Brad you’re old enough to know better!” And I’d hide behind Mom and make faces at Brad ‘cause I got him in trouble and he didn’t even do anything! Then Mom would make him apologize to me. Having a sibling rocks!

Scene 13

ERIN: Why is it that we always lie to people who are seriously ill, or are old? I mean we all do it. We think it will make things easier for them. We’re saving them some worry. But it backfires. If you’re really sick, you don’t want to slowly fade away. Most of the time you aren’t feeling good and you get down on yourself for not accomplishing anything that day. When we lie to these people, we only succeed in making them feel more useless. I never thought I’d be a liar, but I was wrong.

It was Christmas and a friend of mine was battling with cancer. I had a present for her and went to her place to drop it off. When I got there, the apartment was dark with the Christmas tree providing the only light. The place was also hot, uncomfortably so. We chatted and she loved the gift.

Then she asked me if I wanted anything to drink. I said no. “Would you like some cookies?” I said, “No, I’m fine really.” “Are you sure?” I could tell she just wanted to be hospitable. I was visiting her place and she wanted to serve me something. I didn’t want to bother her. I ended up saying, “No, really, I had supper before I came.”

She knew I was lying. And I knew she knew I was. I felt horrible. I left shortly after that and wished her happy holidays. I only saw her once after that time. She looked tired, but was refusing to let her illness get the best of her. I remember telling her to take it easy. I shouldn’t have said that. She probably got that all the time.

I still feel bad about lying to her, but I think in a way she understood. I think the truth is definitely a better way to go. We can’t shelter people who are ill from living. Who wants to be treated like a child who people think can’t be told the truth because it might upset them?

I’m sorry I lied to you. I just wasn’t thinking. Please forgive me.

Scene 14

JEN: Hey... God? Yeah, it's me again. Um... I'm not trying to be annoying or really demanding here, but you seem to really be taking your time up there with my request. You know, about the prom date? I mean I know you're busy with, with more important things and all. 'Cause there's world peace and famine to worry about, but this is really important to me, God, and I think you're the only one who can help me here. And if you look at your calendar, my prom is only three weeks away. So that doesn't leave much time.

So... I was thinking it's probably a good idea if you beam him down or whatever it is that you're planning to do because we have to get a tux, you know. With the matching tie and cummerbund, so that we'll coordinate. And I'm gonna have to warn my parents that he'll be coming so that they don't give my extra ticket to Aunt Bertha.

Do you kinda understand what I'm sayin' here, God? I'm sort of on a schedule, so I need the guy. Soon. Not that I'm trying to rush you along here, 'cause I don't want you to think I'm being ungrateful for all you do. I mean you really came through for me last month when you convinced my mom to buy me those shoes. So... I'm sayin' thanks, but please, please, please, do you think you could help me out just this once with the prom date? I promise I won't ask you for anything frivolous like this again. And, I'll only pray for cures for diseases and honest politicians and stuff like that.

OK, well, I'll just leave you alone now to work on this for me. Thanks. Oh... and amen.

Scene 15

VICKI: If I were to describe myself in two words, they would be young, and angry. Young, because I am and I understand young people. And angry, I because I know I am. I'm angry about a lot of things.

I'm angry that I live in a world where people have no respect for each other. I'm angry that everyone talks about there being a God, but he doesn't seem to be doing anything. I'm angry that people view violence as commonplace. I'm angry that there are homeless people begging for money in the streets and people can just walk by and pretend they don't see or hear them. I'm angry that I can't walk alone at night without being on the lookout for an attacker. I'm angry that people are thought guilty until proven

innocent. I'm angry that people have to earn your trust.

A lot of people say these complaints are naïve and juvenile. Maybe they are, but I refuse to turn into some cold uncaring person who doesn't care about these things. Yes. I am angry and I am young. Maybe because I am young, I will be able to make a difference, by using my anger as my energy. Because I want to see change in my lifetime.

Scene 16

JAMIE: Oh man! It's the greatest feeling in the world! Talk about an adrenalin rush! I love it! It's great! Nothing compares to when I'm playing football. Nothing. I make the catch and I'm running for the touchdown. There are guys heading at me from every direction. I look for the spaces between them, and I run! It is the best! The games aren't about the cheerleaders, or the screaming fans. It's about catching the ball and running. When I make a break away, no one can catch me. I feel like I'm flying. I feel so alive! You can keep your schoolbooks and your part time jobs. I don't want anything like that. I just want to play the game, to score the points, to run. I wanna play football forever. I want to fly forever! No one can catch me or make me stop. I'm telling you it's the greatest feeling in the world!

Scene 17

ERIN: In theatre it's called the fourth wall. That imaginary wall between the actors and the audience. The actors don't know they are being watched and ignore the fourth wall. The audience looks in on them and learns all about their characters.

Sometimes the actors break the fourth wall and talk to the audience, and the illusion is broken. The crowd doesn't know for sure if what they are watching now is the truth, or a facade because the actors know they are being observed. The fourth wall isn't just in the theatre. They're everywhere. People have put them up so that they can see only what they want to see. And people hide behind them hoping others won't look in on them.

Scene 18

JEN: You know, it's funny. When I was younger I always had these ideas about what it was like to be grown up. Somehow things just don't turn out like you plan you know?

VICKI: You know when you finally get the guts to confront someone who's really hurt you? And you ask them questions like, "Why?"

and “How could you?” And you wait for an explanation. And all you get are a bunch of words that have nothing to do with the truth.

JAMIE: Now c'mon. You can't tell me you don't have any regrets. Everyone has regrets. Well, one at least. I have a regret. Just the one, but it haunts me.

ERIN: They say you mellow as you grow and I think that's true. When we get older, our fears are no longer of the dark, or the test at school. It's one overriding fear that dictates everything. The fear of being lonely and alone.

TROY: I think kids are the coolest. They aren't like adults at all. You can tell a kid anything and they won't think you're crazy. They just accept you as you are. I think that's great.

Scene 19

JAMIE: Hi, Sheri. I thought it was about time you and I talked. This is weird. God, I had so much to say, and now...

Bet you were surprised how many people came, huh? To pay their last respects. Probably didn't think that many people gave a damn whether you were around or not. Your mom... she's um... she's not doing so well. I can't believe she put yellow flowers all over the church. Everyone knows you hate yellow. I could picture you laughing somewhere up there about that.

You probably heard and all, but there wasn't enough room in the church for everyone. A whole bunch of us got shipped off to this room and had to watch the whole thing on a little 6" TV. Do you have any idea how that felt? I mean we all couldn't believe you'd gone and killed yourself, and then we had to watch your funeral on a goddamned TV like it was some soap opera. Bet you thought that was funny too.

The minister guy talked for like forever about how just because you'd... well... that we shouldn't do the same. Said you wouldn't want that. You'd want the rest of us to carry on and do great stuff. Said we were supposed to forgive you. Let me tell you something, Sheri, when you're 16 years old and you watch your best friend being put into the ground for forgiveness isn't exactly top on your list. What the hell were you thinking? That nobody cared? That life really was worthless?

You had so much left to do, you know? I'm doing all these things for the first time, like getting my license, and working at the



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