

FAMILY PORTRAIT

A ten-minute play

by Greg Machlin

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Characters

<u>FRANK:</u>	Father. Late 30s. (all ages are for start of play.)
<u>MARCIA:</u>	Mother. Late 30s.
<u>PATTI:</u>	Daughter of Frank & Marcia. Age 12.
<u>WILL:</u>	Older son of Frank & Marcia. Age 11.
<u>GEORGE:</u>	Younger son of Frank & Marcia. Age 7.

Author's Note

The characters age 4 years over the course of this play; the change in time should be portrayed through acting. Makeup shifts are not necessary, nor are costume changes.

SCENE:

(A living room. A family—Frank (late 30s), Marcia (late 30s), Patti (age 12), Will (age 10), and Alex (age 7) face a video camera.  
Present day. October. Year 1.)

FRANK

Hi, everyone. I just bought a new digital video camera—the latest model from Sony—and I'd like to do this once every year, October 26.

WILL

Technically, *I* figured out how to work the camera. I think it'd be cool to film us—a documentary.

MARCIA

(smiling)

Frank likes his gadgets. To whoever's watching this—Frank, who will be watching this?

PATTI

Future generations. For *posterity*.

WILL

“Posterity”? You're a geek.

PATTI

Shut up!

FRANK

So, if everyone could just say a few things about themselves: Marcia, let's start with you.

MARCIA

Oh, great.

(recovering)

My name is Marcia; I'm married to a wonderful man, we have three wonderful kids. I like to cook, I like to garden, I like to build things—I built, sanded the chairs in our kitchen—anything with my hands, really.

WILL

I'm Will!

PATTI

Wait your turn, dummy!

(WILL pinches PATTI’s arm.)

PATTI

Ow! Creep!

(WILL grins.)

WILL

Now it’s on tape forever!

PATTI

I’m Patti, I’m in sixth grade, and it’s *not* as bad as everyone says. Some of the kids are jerks, but screw ‘em.

FRANK

Patti!

PATTI

What? You say it all the time. Anyway. I’m getting close to straight As, except in biology, which is stupid, but my teacher, Ms. Rochelle is all right. My English teacher, Mr. Berube, is bald, and the art teacher makes fun of him for it, but I think they’re just pretending to have a feud.

WILL

I’m Will, and my sister’s a geek!

MARCIA

Will.

WILL

She *is*...

FRANK

Will, why don’t you tell us what *you* like.

WILL

Okayyyyy... I’m in fourth grade. I like explosions. I like to watch things blow up. I like to draw cartoons. Like, once, I drew this alien and its *head* exploded.

MARCIA

George, do you want to say anything?

(GEORGE shakes his head. He is silent. Pause.)

FRANK

All right, well, I’m Frank, I am the head of this motley crew. I work in the offices of Hampshire & Mosley as an accountant; and...

(shrugs)

these are my guys.

I think that’s enough.

(pause)

GEORGE

(serious)

I like trains!

(lights fade to black.)

(Lights up. Year 2: Everyone is one year older. Frank & Marcia are under more stress.)

FRANK

All right. One year from the day.

Uh... I don’t know who should go first.

MARCIA

(sighs)

I’ll go...

Another year older. Don’t know if we’re any wiser. Frank, do I—I have to finishing balancing the checkbook.

FRANK

Was that really necessary?

MARCIA

It’s what I’m working on! Will you please stop thinking I blame you?

PATTI

Maybe we should do this later. We can always turn it off—

FRANK

No. We do this now. One year to the day. I leave for work in fifteen minutes.

PATTI

(to camera)

Dad lost his job.

FRANK

It was *outsourced*, there was *restructuring*—

MARCIA

Patti, do you want to say anything about school?

PATTI

I like seventh grade fine, but my friend Joanne... she seems upset and cries all the time. I think it's because her father... he touches her... in bad places.

(FRANK and MARCIA turn to stare bug-eyed at Patti.)

PATTI

(smirking)

Kidding.

FRANK

Patti!

PATTI

(grinning)

Sorry.

MARCIA

Will, Would you like to say something about school?

WILL

School is school. Who cares?

PATTI

He gets picked on.

WILL

I said not to talk about it.

PATTI

They're assholes. You should just ignore them.

FRANK

Patti! Language!

PATTI

They are.

MARCIA

George. Would you like to say anything?

(long pause)

WILL

Come on, George.

(long pause)

GEORGE

(serious)

I don't like trains anymore.

(pause)

I like dinosaurs.

(Lights fade. Lights up. Year 3. Frank, Marcia, Patti, and George are present.)

(Long pause.)

FRANK

Uh, hello. I'm not even sure if we should be doing this, but...one year to the day, so... here goes nothing.

(long pause)

Will... Will isn't with us.

Will... passed away.

PATTI

Died.

FRANK

Died.

It's hard to say.

MARCIA

A little over three months ago.

(long pause)

Frank, I don't feel up to doing this right now.

FRANK

All right.

(he moves to switch it off.)

PATTI

No!

We have to.

For Will.

(pause)

FRANK

All right.

After a two week bereavement period, I returned to work at the new accounting firm I had gotten a job with five months ago. Before...

Now, no one knows how to talk to me.

MARCIA

I don't know... we had to pack up his clothes the other day. I was fine—well, not *fine*—good God, none of us are *fine*—I was *managing*... until I got to his red hooded sweatshirt\, which he always used to love, despite how dirty it was...

(She breaks down.)

(Silence.)

PATTI

I'm Patti. I'm in the eighth grade. He should have been able to talk to me... I'm his sister. He committed suicide, by the way, in case you haven't been able to figure that out yet. He used a plastic bag and glue, which I didn't even realize could be used for suicide. The glue, I mean. Apparently some kid at school told him how to do it. He left a note, apologizing to everyone.

(Silence)

Well, that's it. That's all there is to it. It was a nice funeral. Everybody said how *sorry* they were. I don't really care. *Sorry* doesn't really do much for me.

FRANK

Maybe we should...

PATTI

Don't forget about George, like you usually do.

(She turns to George.)

George, say something.

(Pause. George is silent.)

George, please say something.

(Pause.)

George, what do you like?

(Pause.)

George... what do you like?

(George is silent.)

(Lights fade. Lights up. Year 4.)

FRANK

So. Welcome to our family portrait, or Dante's Inferno.

(he laughs. No one else does.)

Sorry.

I'm beginning to think nobody should watch this.

MARCIA

I don't think we'll ever want to watch this.

FRANK

Thanks for coming back to do this, by the way.

MARCIA

You're welcome.  
Who should start?

FRANK

God, where to begin...

PATTI

I'll begin. Frank and Marica, also known as my parents, got divorced.

FRANK

Which is apparently quite common after...

PATTI

After the *death*. Of a *child*.

(Silence)

Meanwhile, your humble narrator has recently been released from a three-month residential therapy program, aka rehab.

MARCIA

And congratulations to you on graduating.

PATTI

It's rehab, Mom, not college.

Rochelle and Tina actually came to visit me while I was there. Danielle's a thousand miles away, but she wrote me every week. Which is more than I can say for my dear, *dear* parents.

FRANK

We tried, Patti.

PATTI

What the Hell does that mean? “We tried.” You either visit or you don't.

MARCIA

Patti—

PATTI

Forget it.

So, Dad, how’s work?

FRANK

Work is fine.

PATTI

Been pretty busy with it, haven’t you?

MARCIA

Patti, your father works very hard—

PATTI

Quit defending him. He abandoned us. You *both* did.

FRANK

All right, that’s it. I’m tired of this. I am tired of this and I’m *tired* of you!

(Stunned silence.)

PATTI

Glad you’re being honest about it.

(long pause)

FRANK

We all... respond to grief— in different ways. And that’s—

PATTI

Stop doing that! Stop *explaining* everything! Stop *analyzing* everything! Tell me how you feel?!

FRANK

My son is dead. How do you think I feel?

PATTI

What about George??

(Pause. Frank looks at George.)

FRANK

Hi, George. Sorry you had to be dragged into all of this.

(Pause.)

GEORGE

That’s okay.

(Lights fade. Lights up. Year 5. Frank, Marcia, Patti, and George are present.)

FRANK

Hello, everyone.

I'll start. I'm back at Hampshire & Mosely... actually, they're now Hampshire, Greenwald & Mosley... and I supervise accountants in my departments, so I have more responsibility.

PATTI

More money, too.

FRANK

Patti.

PATTI

It's true.

FRANK

The more things change...  
Marcia?

MARCIA

Seven months ago, I re-married a wonderful man named Jan, he's German. Originally. From Berlin.

GEORGE

He's got all kinds of strange stories about growing up and looking at the Berlin wall.  
(everyone looks at him)

What?

PATTI

You don't usually talk.

GEORGE

I talk. The camera just weirded me out for a long time.

PATTI

I see a future for you as a film actor.

GEORGE

Ha, ha.

PATTI

Jan is actually kind of cool.

I’m seeing someone, as well...

FRANK

(Pause)

And her *name*?

PATTI

Her name is Rita.

FRANK

Lovely Rita, meter maid...

MARCIA

I think next time Jan and Rita should participate.

PATTI

Jan had to be in Denver for a conference. Next year, for sure.

MARCIA

So, George. Now that you’re talking... what did you do over the summer?

PATTI

I went to paleontology camp.

GEORGE

You’re even geekier than I was.

PATTI

I liked paleontology camp.  
I miss my older brother.

GEORGE

I think we all do.

MARCIA

All right. I think that’s it for this year.

FRANK

(lights fade)

END OF PLAY