

Soldier, Come Home

by Frank W. Wicks

a play based on family Civil War letters

ABOUT THE PLAY

Soldier, Come Home is based on the letters of Frank W. Wicks' great-grandparents, Mary Luke Pringle and Philip W. Pringle, and family members, written during the period 1859 to 1865 from western Pennsylvania and from major Civil War battle sites, including Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, the Siege of Petersburg, and Appomattox.

In 1950, the long-forgotten letters were discovered in a shoe box in the attic of the home of Wicks' grandparents, John S. Wicks and Sadie Pringle Wicks, in South Fork, Pennsylvania. Wicks' father, Frank Wicks, Sr., began the project of transcribing the letters.

Wicks, a founding member of the Long Wharf Theater and a graduate of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, continued the project after his father's death and then began transforming the letters into a play, weaving the story of one family through the events of the Civil War.

"I was struck from the beginning by the powerful content of the letters," Wicks says. "They were filled with complicated relationships, humor, and struggles for survival. I felt that the energy of the letters, plus their historical importance, would make a dramatic presentation."

Mary Pringle wrote to her husband from Armagh, Pennsylvania, while Philip and other family members corresponded from several battle sites. Letters by relatives were also written from the Cambria County, Pennsylvania towns of Summerhill, Pringle Hill, Johnstown, Wilmore, and Ebensburg.

Author's Notes

For those of you considering a production of *Soldier, Come Home*, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War, I offer the following notes about my concept for the original production of the play:

The play was conceived as a concert. The image of Pavarotti and Tebaldi walking onto the New York Philharmonic stage comes to mind; he in a tux, she in an evening gown. They carry a score bound in a black binder. It's a concert version of "La Boheme." Music. Singing begins. Little by little, they transcend the confines of the concert, establish relationships and become the characters; we see only Mimi and Rodolfo and are caught up emotionally by the music and the singing.

This is the goal I set for *Soldier, Come Home*.

Music. Five actors walk onto the stage - men in tuxes and the woman in an evening gown - carrying black binders containing the letters. Music fades, lights up on first actor.

Reading begins. Little by little, the actors transcend the confines of the "concert" reading, become the characters and establish relationships. The letters become the dialogue and the conflicts, humor and emotions take over.

The set, backdrop, lights, costumes, furniture and sound, along with the letters, are an integral part of the concept of the play. They work together as a unit.

The set: Black risers or platforms at two or three different levels, from 10 inches to 3 feet high. Five dark colored, plain wooden chairs are placed on platforms. A black curtain hangs behind the set.

Minimum lighting: Five front of house lekos - one focused on each actor and each light is on a separate dimmer. Overhead is blue backlight (fresnels) to shape actors but used mainly to give actors enough light by which to read the letters.

Sound: Pre-show music. This is the place for a nod to the Civil War era. Your choice of period music. As lights dim and play starts, segue to lively Civil War music as cast enters the stage. Fade sound as lights come up on first actor. **Note:** Recent productions have presented 15 minutes or so of live music by performers playing and/or singing Civil War era songs just before the play starts. Very effective.

Also: I have seen extremely effective productions done simply - in an open room - small platform, basic lighting, actors in white shirts and black slacks/long black dress or simple clothes suggesting the character - with music fading in and out throughout - a bit like a radio play. I have also seen effective productions using full costumes and sets. Clearly, it is up to each director to use his or her freedom and imagination in the presentation of this play.

One final thought: Letters read on stage can be a lively, riveting experience if they are read with urgency and energy and if actors constantly find and introduce new thoughts within each letter. Civil War letters were never ordinary: they were the only means of communication - filled with urgent messages. (<http://civilwarplay.com/playwrights-blog/family-civil-war-letters/>)

SOLDIER, COME HOME

By Frank W. Wicks

**A play based on the Wicks Family
Civil War letters**

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CHARACTERS

The play is performed by a cast of 5:

MARY LUKE PRINGLE, in her mid-twenties

PHILIP W. PRINGLE, in his late twenties

Mary and Philip are young and attractive lovers, with animal magnetism. We see Mary, especially, grow and change throughout the play - from carefree young girl to seasoned responsible mature woman. There are moments in the play where there is a definite transition to a "new" Mary - her voice gets stronger and more powerful as the play progresses. Both Mary and Philip have a sense of humor - there are many moments in the letters when this humor is apparent.

DAN LUKE, Mary's brother

Dan Luke is an orator and proud of his achievements and opinions. He is enthusiastic with a good sense of humor. He "paints" a wonderful picture of army life.

MARTIN PRINGLE, JR., Philip's younger brother

Martin Pringle, Jr. is quite a contrast to Dan - sort of a comic character - boyish, young, innocent - right off the farm - wide-eyed. The first few letters of Martin's and Dan's are a quick back and forth volley of energy, urgency, excitement.

1 actor plays these 4 characters:

JOHN LUKE, Mary's father

ISAAC M. EDELBRITE, a family friend

JOSEPH PRINGLE, Philip's older brother

MARTIN PRINGLE, Sr., Philip's father

Up to the actor and director to find a different voice and quality for each character.

The play is read by five actors, each holding a black binder containing the letters. (Actors may opt to memorize the letters, establishing a more direct communication with the audience). Throughout the play, the actors stand as they read, facing the audience. There is a light "special" which comes up quickly on each actor as he or she reads a letter.

The set is made up of platforms with 5 chairs. As audience arrives, music is playing and the open stage is bathed in blue light. At certain time, house lights dim and music changes to lively Civil War era music. Actors enter stage right and take their places. (If there is live music, actors enter as musicians' final song ends) Actors sit - except for the older man who plays four roles. He will read the Prologue.

Music fades. Lights up on Prologue.

The play is performed without an intermission.

Prologue (Optional) - By Holly Sauerbrunn

Perhaps you've felt this...this wish that you could speak directly to your ancestors, to those family members long since gone. What would you ask them? Would you want to know where they lived, what they wore, what life was like for them on a day to day basis? What if they could answer you? What if they could speak to you from the distant past, re-creating for you the world they knew?

In the case of Frank W. Wicks, his great-grandparents have spoken to him...through a shoebox of letters written between his great-grandfather, Philip Pringle, and his great-grandmother, Mary Luke Pringle, between the years of 1859-1865 from western Pennsylvania and from major Civil War battle sites.

The letters were discovered in the attic of Wicks' grandparents' home; his father began to transcribe them, and Wicks carried on with the work after his father's death.

In addition to the letters between the husband and wife were letters from other family members, such as Mary's brother Daniel and Philip's brother Martin, also Union soldiers during the Civil War.

Writing letters was the only way that soldiers and their families could communicate, and when the mail service was disrupted, as it often was, it could be weeks before wives could be sure that their husbands were still alive and soldiers could be reassured that they had not been forgotten.

In a blog about the play, Wicks writes, "As I worked on these historically important letters, I began to wonder if there was a way that I could share my family's stories with a wider audience, so I began transforming the letters into a dramatic presentation, weaving the story of one family through the events of the Civil War."

The end result of his work along those lines is the play you are about to see tonight. Although the events the letters describe took place 150 years ago, the play's themes are still relevant. Soldiers are still sent far from home into dangerous territory; family members are still left behind to carry on and pray for their safe return. The means of communication may be different and more immediate---cell phones, email and Skype as opposed to pen and paper---but the love and longing for reunion are eternal.

Prologue actor sits. Mary rises

(Actors read all names and dates at the top of letters)

MARY

(Play begins with energy, excitement and enthusiasm)

November 14th, 1859
Curlsville, Pennsylvania

Mary Mae Luke to Philip W. Pringle

Dear Philip,

It is with pleasure that I take up my pen this evening to answer your kind letter, which I received on the tenth and learned from its contents that you are well. I am getting along well at the present time and I hope these few lines will find you in the same state of health.

Oh, Philip, nothing can tell how much I think of you. You are never out of my mind ten minutes through the day nor night. *(find a little humor here)* Only when I am sleeping. If you but knew how I love you. Oh, that I had the privilege of leaning my head on your dear arms once more it would be my heart's delight. I cannot write as I would like to but if my heart could speak or write I think this would be a much better letter. I dreamed of you last night.

I am truly yours,

Mary M. Luke

PHILIP

(quick - not a second's pause)

January 23rd, 1860

Dear Mary,

It is with the greatest of pleasure that I have taken my pen in hand to let you know I got home Friday night safe and sound. I feel to rejoice to hear that you are well and still remain mine in the bonds of love.

Mary, you wanted to know if I told anyone we are to be married. *(pause, look at audience, smile)* I told everyone. *(pause)* When I got home every person wished me happiness. I thanked them all. Mary, I am at a loss how to write or how to express myself. But my love to you shall never fail.

I remain yours truly, Philip W. Pringle

MARY

(quick - build)

Oh Dear, I would not have set that date for our marriage if I had known that another one would have suited you better. As far as it being good luck in the light of the moon, I never heard that before. Philip, please tell me where we are going to live, if you know. Oh, I don't know what is the matter with me. I feel so anxious.

PHILIP

(overlap - build) Now Mary, do not worry. I will be up there on the 11th in good time to see you and talk with you and plan the day. It's with you I mean to spend my days on earth. I will be your constant companion, shielding you as best I can from the storms of life.

MARY

(top of build)

Oh, Philip, I feel like I don't have a care in the world. Together we will dwell in peace and harmony and joy. Nothing can interfere with the pleasure and happiness I feel today.

JOHN LUKE

(big - not a second's pause)

John Luke to Mary Luke Pringle
Dear Daughter,

I set myself down to let you know that we are all well at present for which we are thankful to the good Lord for his mercies. You cannot tell how glad we were to see you. We wish you fond happiness in your life together. You and Philip departed just as the roads got bad. The stage cannot get along now. They have to carry the mail on horseback. The times is very hard at present on account of the money being so scarce. There is no work to be done here. Some are going out to the mountain to make barrel staves.

(build) Tell Philip I think Lincoln will make a fine president. But he has his troubles ahead with all the unrest in our country today. We hear Georgia and Alabama might leave the Union. No more at present. Remain ever yours.

Your affectionate father

MARY

(build)

April 14th, 1861

Dear Papa,

I take up my pen this day to drop you a few lines. Philip and baby Luella are well, but there are a great many sick in this community with the small pox. *(amazed - announcing brand new information)* We just heard the news of the attack on Fort Sumter. I feel so sorry for our poor country. Philip thinks this rebellion will turn into war. But the President promises there will be no bloodshed. You must excuse me for not writing sooner as the creek has been very high for some time and is not fordable now, but I will send this as soon as I can.

Your loving daughter

DAN LUKE

(not a second's pause)

January 22nd, 1862

Army of the Potomac

Dan W. Luke to Mary Pringle

Dear Sister Mary, *(excited)*

I have answered the President's call for volunteers to help crush the rebellion. He says this will be a short but decisive war. Let us swear by the great eternal that our cause is just. Mary, we are now encamped on the banks of the Potomac. It is quite a sight! Hundreds of neatly arranged white tents on the shores of this beautiful stream. We are nearly 200,000 men. Your letter finds me in good health only my feet is a little cold. The drums are beating for roll call, so I must go. Remember me to Philip and all the friends and write soon.

MARTIN PRINGLE, Jr.

(quick response)

February 11th, 1862

Company G, 12th Regulars, USA

Fort Hamilton, Brooklyn, New York

Martin Pringle, Jr. to Philip W. Pringle

Dear Brother, *(so happy to be a part of this)*

Your letter found me well and more than usually glad to hear from you. First, I must tell you I am getting along just fine doing my patriotic duty for the stars and stripes and training for battle. But the weather is very rough here - wet and raining and the ground is covered with ice. Second, I am enjoying good health although I am run out of money, but we will get paid next week and then I shall have some again. Philip, I wish you could see into our room at meal time. It would make you laugh to see all them six-footers grabbing for food. What a sight! Write soon. How is the weather there? I remain your affectionate brother, Martin. Kiss little Luella for me.

p.s. Please excuse all mistakes and bad spelling.

DAN

(build)

Oh! What glorious news of our army in Missouri and Kentucky. The surrender of Fort Donelson, the capture of Roanoke Island by General Burnside and the destruction of Elizabeth town is no small matter and will certainly cause terrible confusion in the Rebel army. You should hear the shouts of joy here. Brass bands are playing all over camp. A few more such victories and you will see Dan Luke at home.

MARTIN

(build - laughter - try a "wheee")

We have some splendid times here! Last Saturday G and E company had a great fight. None of our boys was hurt but some of the other company was almost killed. A few of our boys are in the guardhouse handcuffed. It happened that I was on guard and so I was not in the scrap but I keep out of such. Philip, I have yet to take my first drink in the state of New York and intend to remain so although there are many enticements to drink and play cards from which I refrain. Now I want you to write to me and tell me all the news and about the weather.

DAN

(angry - indignant)

I hear a great deal about folks being dissatisfied about the inaction of the Army of the Potomac of which I would say that they are entirely ignorant of the plans of the government and know nothing at all about the condition of the weather here.

I think McClellan is right, we should not be rash or impatient in our undertaking.

MARTIN

(audible hoot here - like a "wow")

We are kept mighty strict here. We had another inspection this morning and we were all very busy getting ready. We had everything put up real nice. Our guns and brasses glistened. It was a caution. We also had the articles of war read to us and was informed that we are to leave in less than ten days for Washington. The boys got tight in the head and there was a great time of it.

DAN

July 5th, 1862

Camp at Harrisons Landing, Virginia

15 miles from Richmond

Mary, Dear Sister, (*don't get too morose - keep energy*)

The battles have begun. For seven long days and nights we have been fighting the Rebels. All the time without sleep. And nothing to eat but crackers and such. We whipped the enemy and drove them off the field at the point of the bayonets. But oh! what a sight it was. All over the field lay the dead and dying - smothering in their own blood, crying for water. They lay 4 or 5 deep where our grape and shell cut them down like grass. The scene is too terrible to talk about.

After the fight, General McClellan rode along our lines - he was just as muddy as some old grave digger. Every man that could speak yelled out at the top of his voice. Napoleon was never received with more enthusiasm.

ISAAC M. EDELBRITE

September 24th 1862

Sharpsburg, Maryland

Isaac M. Edelbrite to Mr. P.W. Pringle

Dear Sir: (*quite a "character"- almost shouting this*)

We are encamped on the late Antietam battlefield. Calvin Edelbrite got his arm shot off at the charge on South Mountain. There was about twenty thousand rebels killed where I am now and there was about three or four thousand wounded. Every barn and hog pen and out house and everything else is full of them and we took about 8000 prisoners at this last fight. I tell you what, them old cannons did crack sharp. Give my best respects to all inquiring friends.

I wish you would send me some tobacco if you please and when I get my money I will send you the pay for it.

DAN

May 18th, 1863 (*build*)

You have probably heard by now about our terrible loss at Chancellorsville. Calling up men for only nine months was the greatest mistake our government ever made. Now General Hooker's army is almost all broken up. Hooker would have had the grandest victory but for the cowardice of the 11th army corps. At the first appearance of the enemy they threwed down their arms and ran away - disgracing our entire army. They was mostly German and wouldn't fight under nobody but Sigel. They deserve nothing but shame and dishonor.

Phil, I am very glad your patriotism remains high. But you must stay and take care of your wife and little Luella and the baby. We must conquer and we will.

MARTIN

(build)

I would have written sooner but had no paper. The rebel cavalry made a dash on our pickets the other night and wounded and took prisoners. But we fought back with the infantry and some flying artillery and those rebels sure had to hunt for their holes double quick!

Tell Mary all the boys are getting boxes from home and I have some notion to send for one. *(manipulating)* But I suppose it would be too much trouble. I must close. Kiss little Sadie and Luella for me. Pray for me Dear Brother. M. Pringle, Jr.

Write soon and tell me all about your weather.

DAN

July 15th, 1863

I suppose you have heard all the particulars of the Gettysburg fight and I will not weary your patience by giving you another detail. I will only say that we held full possession of the field. I do not think the Rebels will be invading the North again. It was a victory so long desired but terrible was the sights there to behold. Never was our army moved with such promptness and skill as in our last campaign under the supervision of the brave and gallant Meade. May success crown his efforts and victory crown our banners, and a speedy but honorable peace be the final result.

MARTIN

(almost like through a megaphone)

The President's draft call is meeting with resistance. They are drawing lots to see who will go. I hear some are paying money so they don't have to go. Now Philip, I pray you are passed over by the draft.

(sound of trumpet = Philip is drafted. Philip jumps up and stands at attention. There can be a special light on him - or a sound cue - or just simply Philip stands and moves forward)

DAN

Mary,

I sympathize with you in having to be frantic that your husband was called up for the draft. But remember that he is only obeying the great laws of his country second only to the laws of God. Do not worry, the war will soon be over and he will come home before long.

MARTIN

Oh Brother, *(like "Oh, Boy!!)*

You're in for it now! No use trying to get out of it. Keep up good courage. The rebellion must be crushed.

PHILIP

July 29th, 1863 (*energetic - upbeat*)

Dear Wife,

I take my pen to let you know that I am well for which I feel thankful to God - and I hope these few lines will find you all in good health. I am in Camp How about 2 1/2 miles up the Monongahela above Pittsburgh in a very fine place and good quarters. I have a good suit of clothes. No more at this time. But Remain yours, P.W. Pringle

Give the dear little girls a kiss for me.

DAN

Phil,

I would rather the draft had missed you but it has fallen upon you to serve your country and to protect the glorious cause of freedom. The star spangled banner shall wave in triumph over the graves of slaughtered brothers who fell nobly defending our country.

PHILIP

(build)

Mary, We moved from Camp How to Camp Copeland near Braddocksfield 10 miles above Pittsburgh. There are others of drafted men in camp. I enjoy myself very well for there are a good many here that I know. We are in a field near an apple orchard and good water. *(quick barrage of questions - really homesick)* Did you hear of Martin yet? Please let me know who was drafted at Summerhill. Let me know if father has cut that bee tree yet and if there was any more swarm. How are the little girls getting along and let me know what Luella says about me being away. It may be that I will be home sometime this fall.

MARY

Oh, Philip, I miss you so.

Your brother Henry sends you his sympathies. He has invited us to a family gathering at his place in a few weeks. Will you be able to go? Oh, Philip I hope so. He has been cutting wood and making barrel staves for your father for some time now.

Now Philip, James Duncan wants to know what he should do about the cattle. What should I tell him? Oh, Dear husband, I wish you would come home soon. The war cannot last much longer.

I remain your affectionate wife,
Mary Pringle

MARTIN

August 20th, 1863 *(amazed!!)*

I am presently in New York City enforcing the draft and helping to restore order. The riots in opposition to the draft have been terrible. Hundreds have been killed. But they are still drafting 4 or 5 thousand every day. Forty thousand troops are encamped around the city and if the rioters will commence again there will be rough times. We marched from the Battery up Broadway to Washington Square where we encamped. While we slept, our guards and pickets stayed awake on duty as if we were in enemy country.

PHILIP

(upbeat)

We was mustered in for pay yesterday. When I get my money I will send it home and as soon as I can I will get my picture taken. We will get our guns next week. Mary, I think the war will not last long. If we get Charleston and a few more victories the Rebels will give up. I will be home on the 16th if I possibly can get off.

Now Mary, you must not let James Duncan destroy anything. If his cattle does destroy anything do not pay him the money I owe him. He can be made to pay every cent the cattle destroy.

MARY

(overlap - last chance for Mary to be the enthusiastic, silly little girl)

I received your welcome letter on Friday and was glad to hear that you were coming home. Oh, I am so excited. Then you can attend Henry's party. Philip, Pa is going to commence to haul staves on Monday. Dill told father to haul them to the nearest place to the creek. He said that was the agreement. But Pa says he does not know of any agreement. Now Philip, I want you to let me know whether you and him agreed on that to send them down the creek. Oh dear, I wish you were at home. How often have I wished for you at home.

Now dear husband let me know whether you are going to Henry's or not because if I go I must have a dress before I can go. Lucinda is getting her silk dress colored and is getting another one besides. She says she wants to show some respect for Henry's wife. She thinks she is better than other people because she is rich. I will not go among them so poorly dressed. I must close for this time. No more from your true and loving wife. Oh I can hardly wait till I see you. Come home. Goodbye till next week.

PHILIP

Mary, I could not get off today. I had a furlough written but the Colonel did not sign it and of course I had to stay. You need not think hard of it. I was as badly disappointed as you was.

MARY

(pause - the reality is beginning to set in)

It is two months this day since you left home. Now Philip, if you want me to get any relief money you must get a certificate from your captain and send it right away for Dill is going to Indiana to see about some of others relief and he told pap that if I wrote to you, you would send it at once. He is going this week. I want you to tell me all about whether you want me to get relief money or not. I must take an oath that you are the only support I have. If that is the truth I can take the oath without any fears about it. Philip, I have no way of making a living.

PHILIP

I am sorry to hear you have so much trouble with one thing or another. But you must try and do the best you can for yourself and the girls. Did you get Luella new shoes?

Now Mary, put your trust in God. He is able to help you out of all your troubles. Pray oftimes to God to preserve you from all deceit and sin.

MARY

(treat this with a sense of humor - upbeat)

There was a very hard frost here last night. It froze the potato stalks to the ground. I think we will dig our potatoes next week, the early ones, at any rate. Now dear husband, I hope you live a good life. I never go to bed without asking the Lord to preserve you and bring you back to your family again in safety. Oh do not engage in anything bad but I have no fears that you will, *(playful)* but I thought I would warn you.

JOSEPH PRINGLE

Joseph Pringle to: Philip W. Pringle

Dear Brother,

I take my pen in hand at the present time to write you this letter. Times are very hard in regard to money matters. It is almost out of the question to get any money at all. We have some taxes to pay and Lucinda requested me to write to you in regard to that money which she loaned to you. She would like to have it if you can possibly raise it. Please let us know soon what you can do for us in the matter for we must pay the taxes soon or suffer loss. Please accept our love and best wishes.

Your brother, Joseph W. Pringle.

MARY

Dear Husband,

I received two dollars in the last letter you sent me. I got Luella a nice new pair of shoes at Dill's. I told her they were a present from Pa. Now Philip, I would like to send you some eatables. If I can get them to the station I will send some sausages and other things. (*great idea!*) Perhaps I will roast a turkey and send it to you.

PHILIP

This is a very bad night for me. I am on guard and it is raining and is as dark as can be and as muddy as it can be. It is shoe mouth deep all through camp. It is one of the worst places I have seen in my life but it all goes in our lifetime.

I see a good many folks here from every county west of the mountains. Some very hard nuts. There are some running off yet but not as many as at first. There was about four hundred deserted from camp since we are in here.

In your last letter you stated that the cow died. *(pause - directly to audience)* I suppose it was not your fault.

MARY

(pause)

Oh Philip, I wish you could come home Christmas to see us. Dill has nearly all your staves hauled away. Tell me whether this will settle up with him. He says you owe him some money. Now Philip, I would like to know how we stand. I was there at the store to get some flannel to make the children some skirts. Cunningham was so mean. I could not get any for less than eighty cents half cotton and I would not give it. Things are getting dearer. He charges 50 cents for muslin and not good at that. And calico is 25 cents per yard! Oh, this cruel war! And our prisoners are starving in Richmond.

PHILIP

(really upbeat!)

Mary,

I am well and in good spirits. Yesterday was one of the finest days I ever seen for the time of year and Christmas was one nice day and we had one of the finest dinners that could be heard of in all the country. We had as much as we could eat - turkey and chicken and oysters, sweet cakes and pound cakes and pies and apples and mutton and jellies and canned fruit and everything that could be mentioned. We have some turkey in our tent yet.

MARY

(overlap)

I received your letter on Sunday and was glad to hear from you for I was almost crazy to hear from you. It was over two weeks that I did not hear from you. In the first place I will tell you that Luella shows everyone her new little shoes and says, *(imitate Louella)* "My papa sent them from the army." When she gets mad at me she says she will go off with Pa to the army and fight rebels.

MARTIN

January 10th, 1864

The weather is very wet and cold here at present but it is probably much colder up there. I suppose you would like to know how I spent my Christmas and New Year. I spent Christmas on guard and on New Year I spent fasting. All I had was a small piece of fat pork for breakfast.

I have not seen Dan Luke since the scrape at Mine Run. The Pennsylvania reserve are doing railroad duty between here and Alexandria. Received a letter from brother Henry and brother Joseph this evening. They informed me that Uncle Paul was dead. *(pause - look at audience)* I hope it was nothing serious. *(pause)*

(enthusiastic) P.S. Please write and tell me all about your weather.

MARY

It is snowing fast this evening. Philip, I had no rest when I heard that you were sick. I am very uneasy. You must get a pair of boots when you get paid. I will try and shift some money to get along. Now be sure and get what you need for you have to stand out in the storm and we have our houses to be in. *(next - with a sense of humor)*

I was dreaming last night about scrubbing dirty houses *(to audience)* and that is not a good dream for me.

This is the coldest winter I ever seen. It is bitter cold here. It froze all the potatoes in the cellar. Every time I was awake last night I thought of you and that was often for I slept cold.

Now dear husband try and live right. Don't let any of those wicked people lead you astray.

PHILIP

(upbeat)

I must tell you that I got them gloves and socks you sent me. Am glad. They are just right and came right good. We have some jolly times in camp these days. We have very good tents now and everything is fixed nice in them. We live good and comfortable and agreeable together. We had a fine breakfast this morning, toasted bread. Mary, I wish you could be here with me today. There are a good many folks visiting in camp at present. If you come bring about 12 of them Philadelphia newspapers along to paper our tent.

MARY

(desperate)

Sadie is very sick. Yesterday we thought she would not live the night. I sent for John and he came and he said it was inflammation of the lungs. Him and I bathed her in a tub of warm water and we got Jimmy to go for Mrs. Tomb. But he has not come home yet. He sent medicine but the ice went away and no person could get across the creek to get it.

Oh Philip, I wish you could come home. No person knows the trouble I had since you went to the army. This day Sadie is one year old. Did you remember that day? Take good care of yourself and pray for me and daughters.

Write soon.

PHILIP

(really excited)

The president is going to call out one million of men, ages 20 to 60, on the first of February. They are going to go for three months to take the prisoners out of Richmond.

Mary, I would like to see you here now. There are no small pox in camp after all. The men that we thought had them they have the measles only. Please and let me know when you intend coming to see me so that I can meet you at the station. And I want to get your picture taken. They can take them nice now at this place. Yours as ever.

MARY

February 18th, 1864

Dear Husband, (*take your time here*)

This evening I seat myself with tearful eyes and aching heart to tell you about the death of our little Luella. She died on Monday morning between two and three o'clock. She had Diphtheria.

(*desperate*) We done everything for her that we could but nothing seemed to help her. No person cannot be more troubled or sorrow. As soon as she was dead Pa went to get Jacob Sensbough to go and tell you or telegraph for you.

We did not bury her till on Wednesday evening. Your father thought you would surely come. (*build*) I wrote to you but you did not get the letter. I would have written sooner when she got so bad but Pa and Sarah would not let me. They said she would get better. They could not believe she would die.

Oh, it was a solemn night for me. My heart aches for you. My sweet little Luella is no more but she is in heaven where we may go some day. I will close for this time for I cannot write, I cannot see. Good by.

JOSEPH PRINGLE

I embrace the present to write a few lines to you. I feel sympathetic on account of the death of your dear little girl. Through the orders of Providence it has been our lot to part with some of our loving babes. The bud may have a bitter taste but sweet will be the flower. Jesus said to her come home to me and live forever and happy be. Amen.

PHILIP

Loving Wife,

I feel so far from you at this time of sadness. Tell me when next you write, did you bury sweet Luella in her little shoes? But Mary, don't weep. Our beloved is happy with angels in heaven and is free from sorrow and pain.

It is miserable here today. It turned in wet in the afternoon and very hard in the evening and then rained all night. One squad of drafted men was sent off to the Potomac army to the front.

MARY

April 10th *(a new change for Mary - firm - tougher)*

I seat myself this morning *(take your time)* to speak to you through the silent voice of the pen.

(new thought - tough) You said you would get off when your nine months was up. You were drafted for only 9 months. Philip, the time is up now. Oh, how glad I would be if I knew that you could come home. I don't see how people can live. Times are very hard. Things are getting dearer every day. Dear Husband, it is so long to stay without you. I need you. I do not understand why you do not come home when your time is up.

PHILIP

(argument with Mary - as if this is the reason)

We have a new commander in camp. General Copeland is removed on account of mismanagement. The conditions at camp have been terrible. More than 100 men have died here since January. We are tired of being so long at one place.

MARY

(keep argument going - build on Philip's last letter)

Philip, I did not get any relief money since the fall. Dill sent me word to come down last Saturday a week but I could not get across the creek. It was very high so I can't draw one cent. All this time I did not draw. It is hard on me for things are so costly. Meat is sixteen and one half cents per pound. I would not care, but we are so deep in debt. This way I can't save one cent. Oh, that this cruel war was over that has caused so much grief in our happy country.

We got your photograph. Sadie was almost crazy - she kissed it more than one dozen of times. I believe she knows that it is you. I kissed your lips before I sat down to write. But they were cold as ice.

PHILIP

(strong - big)

Mary, you wanted to know if I would be free again since my nine months would be up soon. I cannot tell you anything about it. It is rumored that we will be discharged before long. But it is only talk. Mary, my country needs me. If the war continues I must serve my country and stay for one more year. Do not look for me home this spring.

MARY

(give it to Philip - upbeat - rubbing it in)

Well, I had a letter from Martin last Saturday. He is not reenlisting and will come home the First of June. Just one more campaign yet. He is very well and in good spirits and sent his photograph to me. It is nice. He looks as he always did. I must tell you that another of our bees are dead. The old one of all. It starved to death. It had not one drop of honey to eat.

PHILIP

(Can't wait to get into the battle)

Mary, We just got the news. We leave for the front in a few days. All the drafted men are sent to the front. We go to the 102 Regiment to Brandy Station, Virginia. We have to be ready to go at the word go. Our boys are all on a spree tonight. They are all very merry.

Today is my birthday. I am 31 years of age.

MARY

(quick - new thought)

Harrison Dillinger died last Wednesday in the 54th regiment at Cumberland. His father went down and fetched him home and buried him in Jefferson. His father and mother take it very hard and lament their loss very much.

PHILIP

May 5th

I am boxing up some things to send home. Was out washing clothes and then cleaned up my gun. Drew 26 dollars pay and sent 22 dollars home to you. We will be sent to the front tomorrow at 3 o'clock. And so I bid you goodbye for a while. Be of good cheer. Put your trust in God, Mary. I will write as soon as convenient. Give Sadie a kiss for me.

MARY

(overlap)

Oh, dear husband, how often I think of you. Sadie is sitting on my lap and we are praying that you return home safe. My hand is shaking so, I cannot write.

PHILIP

(big - excited = build next 3 letters = one on top of the other - he is VERY happy to be in battle)

May 12th

It is hot here in Virginia. Our boat landed at Belle Plain. Mary, it was the first time I was on a steamboat to take a ride. We drew 5 days rations and 60 rounds of cartridges and are marching towards Fredericksburg. There was a hard battle fought today. We could hear the roar of cannons all day.

PHILIP (con't)

(This is what he's been waiting for build)

May 15th

We are in the front line of battle behind our rifle pits and we are ready to move at a moment's notice on the enemy. We are about 2 miles from Spotsylvania Court House. I am sending this by a wounded soldier.

May 19th *(build)*

Camp near the front, Spotsylvania

Dear Wife,

I am alive yet for which I am thankful to God for his kindness to me. We was in a battle on the 18th and was shelled like forty. The shot and shell came almost as thick as a blinding snowstorm. There was some of the hardest of fighting done that ever was fought and our army is victorious. We took about 1,000 prisoners and have Lee surrounded and will no doubt capture him and his army. Mary, I am well and in good spirits. We may have a battle at any moment.

Brother Martin was wounded the 5th of this month in the left shoulder by a minnie ball and the last I heard from him he was in the hospital and doing well. *(make a point of this)* But Dan Luke is missing since the first battle and suppose he is killed. Please write soon and I will write when I can, and will write more if I am alive or am spared.

DAN

(pause - jump up = loud and happy)

It is with pleasure that I inform you that I am still alive. *(pause)* I was captured on the 5th of May with 60 of my regiment. I am now a prisoner of war in Richmond. There are four hundred in one brick house and we are kept in close confinement. It is generally understood that there will be no mail sent north. Perhaps this will not reach you but I will do the best I can by putting it in the mail. Do not be uneasy about me as I will take care of myself and if I am hurt it will be my duty. As ever, Dan W. Luke

PHILIP

June 5th, 1864

Cold Harbor, Virginia

Mary, we are in a dangerous place. We made a charge up on the Rebel rifle pits and went through an awful shower of bullets. We have been under continual fire for four days. The bullets flew thick as hail. The ground was covered with dead and a great many wounded. One was shot in the neck and fell on me and made me all bloody. Some of the balls came very close to me and threw sand in my face and eyes. *(louder and faster)* Shells burst so close they made me almost deaf. At present the bullets are flying thick and fast.

(pause - actor looks straight at audience)

Now Mary, don't fret. *(pause)*

God only knows if I will ever come home again. If I fall do not mourn for me. Pray that we may meet again - if not in this world we may meet in heaven.

MARTIN PRINGLE, SR.

June 15th

Martin Pringle, Sr. to Philip W. Pringle

Dear Son,

I received your kind letter this evening and hope when this reaches you that it may find you well and as you wanted to know about your brother Martin...there is sorrowful news. He was wounded at the field of the Wilderness on the 5th of May and died on the 20th. Your brother Joseph went down and brought his body home and was buried on the 26th. He was buried aside his mother. He died in Washington hospital. The chaplain and the men of the hospital told Joseph that they never seen a man die happier than he did. The day he died he was singing and praying all the time and to tell his friends that they should meet him in Heaven.

He was wounded under the left shoulder and through one of his lungs and the bullet was cut out of his back. Joseph has the ball. It was a minny ball. And the last he done was singing, "When I can read my titles clear to mansions in the skies" and when he was about half through singing that hymn he expired. Write soon. From your Dear Father,
Martin Pringle

PHILIP

June 19th (*build - upbeat*)

Mary, we had a hard march. We traveled day and night and got no sleep for 36 hours at a time. We crossed the James River on pontoons below City Point. There was 104 pontoons. I counted them.

We are now in the forest of Petersburg, Virginia. We can see Petersburg plain. Our men are throwing shells into the town every 15 minutes.

We was in another hard battle yesterday. Oh, but the bullets flew thick and the cannons roared. We had to hug the ground very close to keep from getting hit. I do not know how we did escape as we did. It was a miracle. In the evening we buried the dead under a flag of truce.

Dear wife, I mourn terribly for my beloved brother.

MARY

I was sorry to hear of Nicholas Cameron being killed. His mother takes it very hard. She wanted me to ask you if he died in the hospital. The chaplain wrote to them he died on the battlefield. She says she would feel better satisfied if he died in the hospital.

I have not heard from your father since Martin was buried. Poor Martin is no more in this world but hope he is now singing. You and I will meet him some day with our sweet little one.

PHILIP

(big - excited)

Mary, President Lincoln is here visiting the front. We are now tearing up the Weldon Railroad and have destroyed about 6 or 8 miles. We put the ties up on huge piles of fences and brush and then lay the rails on top and set fire to them, and the rails got hot and bent crooked so they will be of no use any more for the railroad. All the roads are cut, I believe, and I think the Rebs will have some hungry bellies before long.

MARY

(overlap)

We had two swarms of bees this month. I think this is a good year for them. James Dill was drafted but stayed at home and paid his money.

PHILIP

I am sorry to tell you that I am not as well as I might be. I have the bowel complaint. I got my sickness by too much hard marching and exposure. I am in the Division Hospital. It is a good place to stay, and have no duty to do but eat and drink. I am getting rested perty well.

MARY

(overlap)

Oh the sorrow and pain it gave my heart to think that you, my dearest friend in this world, must be sick and so far away that I can't see you. Sometimes I think my heart will break.

PHILIP

(strong - big)

Now Mary, you must be content. Be cheerful. Sometimes it is impossible for me to write when we are on a move. You must not think hard of me for not writing. Letters are hard to send. I have no stamps any more so you will not think hard of me if I do not send this letter.

MARY

(Mary herself is staring to go a bit crazy)

I heard yesterday evening that Alexander Irwin is wounded in the neck and the ball came out at his ear. What will his poor wife do? *(big)* She will go crazy.

PHILIP

July 9

You wanted to know if Nicholas Cameron died in the hospital. A man from his company told me that he was wounded in both legs and they carried him to the hospital and there he died and was buried in the hospital graveyard. They was buried nice in rows. They told me that Nick was a brave soldier and they thought a great deal of him.

Mary, you must not fret or trouble yourself about me. Be good of spirit. It would do me good to hear of you being lively and cheerful. You must not be downhearted at all. *(strong)* God loves a cheerful person.

MARY

(almost with an audible laugh)

Well, I have news to tell you. Lizabeth Campbell has a little girl. It belongs to an old gray bearded man that was going round telling fortunes. She denied it all the time. When she got sick to have it they sent for a doctor thinking she was going to die. The doctor told Aunt Betsy she was going to have a baby and Liz said it was a lie and took her mother by the hand and said as sure as there was a God in Heaven it was not so. *(build)* Then when it was born the doctor took it up and said, "Here is your child. Do you believe it now?" *(pause build)* She said she could not believe it yet. *(pause - build - laughing)*

If ever you live to get home I will tell you more about it.

PHILIP

(pause)

I am not fit to march yet and will never be as strong as I was at one time. I am completely broke down and still have the dysentery middling bad. Please send letters to City Point, Virginia, 6th corps ambulance train.

(playful) How is Liz Campbell's little fortune teller?

MARY

Philip, I am well satisfied that you are in the hospital for we hear they are fighting at Petersburg and am glad you were not in that fight. Write to me soon for I can hardly wait. It is all the pleasure I have to write and read your letters. In one of the letters I wrote I sent two stamps. I would have sent more but I am out of money. But if you can't get stamps let me know and I will borrow money and send you some stamps.

PHILIP

(combination shell-shocked and extreme homesickness - almost out of control anger)

Mary, I have not got a letter from you for a month. I have written to you asking why you do not write to me. Have you forgotten me? What is wrong? I have written about 20 letters to you and I have not received one and yet why is it I cannot hear from home and friends any more. Am I forsaken? I hope not. I feel like the lonely dove that has lost her mate. I feel to weep and moan. I do not hear from any of my friends. Oh, how I would like to hear from you.

MARY

Philip,

You said you had not got any letters for four weeks. I am sure we wrote. I wrote and father and Charlotte. You must not think it hard what me not writing more. We had a good rain yesterday evening. The corn looks well. We have one hundred and fifty head of sheep here of Dills. We are going to keep fifty - half for the lambs and half for the wool. Your little Sadie is out on the porch looking at the sheep. She sings about her papooz. She can talk a great many things and she can run about every place. Come home this fall if you can.

(playful) Philip, you must try to be more cheerful.

PHILIP

(pause)

(big - excited)

Last night our men took the Danville Railroad and 1500 as prisoners and 3000 head of cattle from the Rebs. Let me know how you are getting along for provisions. I can not help you any at this time. I have only one cent to my name and that one I am going to keep.

MARY

(big)

There is such good news here. Some of our prisoners have been released and Dan Luke has come home. I dreamed of you last night and this morning I feel some better. Oh Philip, try and come home if you can. Oh how glad I would be to see you.

PHILIP

(overlap)

We have orders today to destroy the Southside Railroad to cut off all supplies and food to the Rebs in Petersburg. They are starving and a great many of them are deserting. They all say that they cannot stand it much longer. I was expecting to get paid this week but the Pay master did not come up yet. We are looking for him every day.

MARY

We heard that Uncle John Pringle has deserted and I think it is the case.

JOSEPH PRINGLE

Joseph W. Pringle
Sickles Barracks Hospital
Alexandria, Virginia. (*strong - big*)

I have seen some pretty hard times since I joined the army. My right leg is considerably paralyzed and I fear it will prove a serious impediment to me. Dear Brother, I was captured by Mosby's Guerrillas and was robbed of all valuables I had. (*sense of humor*) Even my pantaloons were taken. (*new thought*) I was wounded at the time and was allowed to escape.

(*big guild*) The news from our army is good. The Rebellion is on its last legs and slavery is doomed.

PHILIP

March 15th, 1865 (*huge - excited*)

We are under marching orders to attack. We have Petersburg surrounded. Now, Mary, I wrote to you better than 2 weeks ago but I have not received an answer to it yet. The mail was robbed and there was a great deal of money taken. They blamed the mail carrier for it and they have him under arrest. They found a great many letters torn open and thrown away. Some lost 100 dollars, some 200. Someone even 900. I would like to find out if you got that letter. The Rebs are not fighting with their usual courage, Mary. Many are willing to be captured.

MARY

(quick - worried)

I think Sadie has forgotten you. She calls her grampap Pa. She hears us calling him Pap and she calls him Pap, too. Uncle John had his trial. He was found guilty of desertion. His sentence is one years' service in the front.

PHILIP

March 31st *(even more excited)*

Terrible attack by the enemy near Five Forks, but the heroic Sheridan and Chamberlain smashed them to pieces. Hundreds of them wounded and killed. Bullets were flying thick but we beat them back. We join forces with Sheridan's army tomorrow and will sure make the fur fly.

(take your time here - for the "good-byes" - both are really saying good-by forever - no way he could survive)

Mary, I have a feeling the battle will be dangerous, and so I say good by for a while, and perhaps for a long while.

MARY

May God grant that you are living and that you will get home soon to your family and friends. I pray every day for my husband and I trust my poor weak prayers will be heard and answered. Write as often as you can for I can hardly wait till I hear from you but I am afraid to hear the news. Oh, shall I ever see you and hold you in my arms again and tell you I love you. *(pause)* Good By.

PHILIP

(From this point on there is an urgent push to the end of the play - Philip's letters build and build - each one bigger and more energetic than the last - almost out of breath. Mary continues her prayers - letters almost overlap each other)

April 2nd *(big)*

This is an awful day of terror and bloodshed. I have never seen such terrible bombardment in battle. We are on a final assault to drive the enemy out. Mary, the battle is raging and we are in a desperate struggle to capture their forts and guns. There must be thousands wounded and dead on both sides. Our entire line is now stretched around Petersburg. Our troops are beginning to tear up the Southside Railroad. It is just a matter of time before Petersburg falls.

MARY

(overlap)

I have a terrible feeling that you are hurt. Perhaps I am writing to you and you are not living. I can hardly sit to write. All the consolation I have is to trust in God till I get a letter from you.

PHILIP

(overlap - bigger)

Mary, we took Petersburg Sunday, but I had a very narrow escape. I was shot in the back. The bullet passed through my haversack and through 2 tin plates and hard tack and lodged against my back. I thought my back was broke but it only made a blue spot. I never was under so heavy a fire of shell and grape and canisters in my life. The news here is extremely good. We have Richmond and we have the Rebs in a trap.

MARY

(overlap)

I can't tell you my feelings this evening. There is good news from the army, but I can't rejoice till I hear if my husband is living. Then I can think the war will soon be over. That you can come home.

PHILIP

(overlap - much bigger)

Richmond is in flames and the air is thick with cinders of burnt paper and clothing flying in the wind. We are chasing Lee's retreating army. The road is strewn with dead horses and mules, wagons, ambulances, abandoned guns, food, and equipment. The Rebels are defecting by the thousands.

MARY

(overlap)

It is a lonesome evening for me and I am here writing to my dear husband. Now I pray the lord to watch over you and bring you home safe. There will surely be some that will be spared. Oh, out of that few let my husband be one of them.

PHILIP

April 10th, 1865

Dear and Beloved Wife, (*biggest - excitement*)

I must tell you the glorious news of the surrender of General Lee's army. He surrendered at 4 o'clock yesterday at Appomattox Court House, unconditionally, all his forces. Oh, you ought to have been here to hear the cheers and salutes and the joyful roar of shouts from our army, like an anthem of praise to God. We had Lee surrounded and then he had to give up.

We have been marching day and night for 8 days driving and fighting the enemy all the while. They could not stand before us. I think there will be no fighting any more.

Mary, I am spared. I think God heard your prayers, Mary, and spared me. The boys are all in great spirits. We divided up our rations and shared them with the starving enemy.

MARY

April 16th, 1865

Dear and loving husband,

This Sabbath day I take up my pen to answer your letter which I received this week and was truly glad to hear that you have been preserved through all the battles. But I feel sorry and sad today. (*as if she's the first person in the world to hear of it - can't believe it!*) We got the news yesterday evening that Lincoln was shot on Friday night and died on Saturday morning at seven. Daniel was in Ebensburg when the news came to town and it was confirmed so it must be true. I wonder what this world will come to. I was in good heart when I heard you were safe and Richmond was taken - that the war would soon be over. But some mean wretch had to go and shoot President Lincoln. That man will get his reward. The Lord will not let that man go unpunished. Dan said that if any man tells him it was good for Lincoln he will shoot him dead.

PHILIP

May 3rd

Dear Wife,

I could not help but weep when I heard the sad news of the President's death. I was as much grieved as though it had been my own brother. Oh what a gloom and sadness over all the nation. It is the awfulest thing that ever happened in America.

We are here at Danville yet. We may have to stay for some time yet and the men are getting impatient. There is a large graveyard close to our camp filled with our soldiers that starved in prison. About 5000. And a great many Rebs are buried in the same yard. *(pause - look at audience)*

I will send you some Confederate money.

MARY

Dear Husband, *(tough - lay down the law)*

The war is over. I look for you every day. Where are you? Every person is coming home. David Pringle is discharged. I had a letter from him. He wanted to know why you were not here. Uncle John Pringle is at home and is going to move to Ohio. I am so troubled that I do not hear from you. Sadie says her pa will fetch her candy when he comes home.

PHILIP

(continue the argument - top Mary's last letter)

Mary, I do not know what to do. I feel so despondent. I have seen no site as yet for us to get out of the service. But I do not care. I do not care much if I will not get out soon. If I get out now the season will be over for getting work - just so I get home in time to get a winters job. They use us very mean I think. But let them do as they may. We will get home at any rate. By law they cannot hold us any longer now that the war is over.

MARY

(top his letter - Mary is at her strongest and firmest)

Once more it was over one month since I heard from you. I guess you had forgot you had a wife that cares for you. What is the matter with you? You think I don't write to you but that is not the case. If you but knew how much trouble you give me by not writing, you would write oftener than you do. I did not know what to do or what to think.

Last night I dreamed about you all night. Oh, I have dreamed so much about you coming home and could see you so plain and talk to you. But in the morning when I wake up it is all over.

I have been looking for you all week. You talked just like you did not care if you come home or not. What is the reason? I cannot tell.

(strong and firm) Soldier, come home. *(pause -build)*
Quit. *(pause - build)* Mary Pringle.

PHILIP

**July 1st
Washington D.C.**

Dear Wife,

I am happy to inform you that I am on my way home. I have my papers and transportation and am going to start this evening. I will be there in good time.

(Light comes up a bit on MARY. For the first time in the play, PHILIP turns to MARY and speaks to her.)

Mary, do not worry. I know I have been absent for a long time, but now I will be your constant companion, shielding you and Sadie as best I can from the storms of life.

(PHILIP turns back to face the audience)

**No more, but remain yours as ever,
Philip W. Pringle**

(Lights slowly fade on both MARY and PHILIP)

END