

I WISH YOU WELL
The Gwyneth Trial

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Written for Ripped Festival 2023
American Blues Theater

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I WISH YOU WELL

The Gwyneth Trial

CHARACTERS

GWYNETH

Oh my God, is that, holy shit it's Gwyneth Paltrow?!

TERRY SANDERSON

M, mid 70s, *retired optometrist, the plaintiff.*

KRISTIN VANORMAN

F, 40s, *plaintiff's attorney.*

PLACE & TIME

A court room in Park City, Utah. March 2023.

CASTING

The best person for the role has taken any path (whether biological or otherwise) to gender identification.

SYNOPSIS

An Oscar-winning actress skis into a retired half-blind optometrist. Or is it the other way around? During the (ski) trial of the century, the jury weighs the evidence. A meditation on being human in the public eye.

INSPIRATION

I was attracted by the surrealism of a televised trial about ... skiing.

I had planned to write a short play. But the trial was crazier and, ultimately, more poignant than a limited series on Netflix. Fame. Family. Money. Loneliness. Dementia. Gwyneth's monotone outfits. I was addicted. This trial was about so much more than skiing. I transcribed the proceedings from Court TV and adapted it into a full-length play.

Some characters are composites. Some testimony has been consolidated or reordered for space, clarity, and flow. Words have not been added or changed. Yes, they really said that.

This is an early scene.

THE PLAINTIFF TESTIFIES

(We're in the court room.)

(The seats are packed.)

(On the stand: TERRY SANDERSON.)

(At the podium: his lawyer KRISTIN VANORMAN.)

KRISTIN VANORMAN

I wanna talk about skiing. Tell the jury about your ski experience. What type of skier were you?

TERRY SANDERSON

At that time? Or do you want some background?

KRISTIN VANORMAN

We don't need a whole lot of background.

TERRY SANDERSON

OK.

KRISTIN VANORMAN

Back in 2016, what type of skier were you?

TERRY SANDERSON

I was advanced intermediate. There was ... no places I wouldn't go, except um, serious bumps, um, narrow, narrow little gulches, and, ah, I didn't do any big jumps. So, other than that, I would go just about anywhere.

KRISTIN VANORMAN

How often would you ski?

TERRY SANDERSON

Two to three times per week.

KRISTIN VANORMAN

For, how many years?

TERRY SANDERSON

Well I started thirty-seven years ago. It was a ... winter sport for my family, we lived at high elevation.

KRISTIN VANORMAN

And in all those years of skiing, other than the ski collision with Ms. Paltrow, have you ever been in another ski accident?

TERRY SANDERSON

Never.

KRISTIN VANORMAN

OK.

TERRY SANDERSON

Never.

KRISTIN VANORMAN

OK. Let's talk about that day. Um. A couple of preliminary things. How tall are you?

TERRY SANDERSON

I think I'm now five-five.

*(TERRY SANDERSON shakes his head
and shrugs his shoulders.)*

KRISTIN VANORMAN

And what was your weight, at the time of the collision?

TERRY SANDERSON

Well, in the VA, you don't take anything off. Whatever you walk in with, your coats, heavy coats at winter time, boots, um –

KRISTIN VANORMAN

I give that excuse too, when I –

(TERRY SANDERSON laughs heartily)

So how, how much did you weigh, about?

TERRY SANDERSON

Fully dressed. I was sixty-two, sixty-three pounds. Hundred sixty-two, hundred sixty-three pounds.

(KRISTIN's voice drops. The shit's getting real.)

KRISTIN VANORMAN

OK, Terry, take the jury through, what happened in the ski collision.

TERRY SANDERSON

I remember looking and seeing no one. I went right down the run and started making nice soft turns. And so I'm just skiing easy, and paying attention, and um all of a sudden, in front of me, is ... two big signs.

I've never seen that big of Slow Down signs. It seemed like they were four by eight, like a four by eight sheet of plywood size. With great big letters.

SLOW DOWN.

I went, whoa, and I'm lookin' around, and the crowd's about the same as me, speed-wise. So I just –

KRISTIN VANORMAN

So did you pay attention to the sign?

TERRY SANDERSON

I did. And I backed off, whatever I was doing. Then, another big sign. Like ten feet away. The same four by eight sheet there. Big letters.

(TERRY SANDERSON gestures the size of the big letters.)

There must be lots of merging trails down here. So, um, I just backed off. And it was wide open. There was nothing, *nothing* in front of me.

And so, um, I came around that corner, and it was –

It takes my breath away to think –

(TERRY SANDERSON touches his chest.)

TERRY SANDERSON cont.

This is hard. I don't like going through this scene. I, I just remember everything was great and then I heard something I've never heard at a ski resort. And that was a, blood-curdling scream. Just, I can't do it. It was just:

(TERRY SANDERSON throws open his arms.)

AAWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW.

And then:

(He slams his hands together.)

BOOM!!!

And it was like, somebody was out of control and gonna hit a tree and was gonna *die*.

(GWYNETH's face: R U FUCKING KIDDING ME?!)

KRISTIN VANORMAN

That's what was going through your mind?

TERRY SANDERSON

It was instantaneous. Oh my God. Somebody's out of control. And they're really seriously out of control.

*(GWYNETH shakes her head,
almost imperceptibly.)*

*(She glances at the jury,
almost imperceptibly.)*

KRISTIN VANORMAN

So you hear this scream.

TERRY SANDERSON

Yes.

KRISTIN VANORMAN

What happens next?

TERRY SANDERSON

You know, I got hit in my back, so hard. I, I'm, right at my shoulder blades. It felt like, perfectly centered. The fists and the poles were right there, at the bottom of my shoulder blades.

Serious, serious smack. Never been hit that hard. And I'm flying.

(TERRY SANDERSON's illustrates his forward flight path with his arms.)

(He flies down the hill and disappears.)

(GWYNETH appears on the stand.)

KRISTIN VANORMAN

Could you state your name, and spell it for the record please?

(GWYNETH swivels slowly in the chair.)

GWYNETH

Yes. My legal name is Gwyneth, Kate, Paltrow, Falchuk.

That's G-W-Y-N-E-T-H.

K-A-T-E.

P-A-L-T-R-O-W.

F-A-L-C-H-U-K.

(BLACK OUT)

To be continued ...