

**PERUSAL SCRIPT**  
**TWO VERSIONS**

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a play for grades K-3  
by

**Elaine Jarvik**

Based on a TRUE STORY



Newport, Maine

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**RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN.**  
**6-character version**

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**Characters: 1m 1f 4either**

**IZZY**, 8, a talkative know-it-all who doesn't know it all

**JJ**, 5, her brother, who has lots of questions

**THE RIVER**

**THE SWAMP**

**THE CAVE**

**THE MOUNTAIN**

Setting:

Here and lots of other wondrous and fearsome places

**RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN.** by Elaine Jarvik 1m 1f 4either [running time 30 minutes] This is based on the true story of five-year-old JJ (who has lots of questions) and eight-year-old Izzy (a know-it-all who doesn't know it all), siblings who have recently lost their grandmother. They embark on a funny and touching hero's journey to try to make sense of loss, grief, death and life. Exploring this timely topic with humor and heart, everyone learns of resiliency and "sticky" emotions, while being able to see themselves reflected in these characters and draw support and strength from their experience with the play. **ORDER #3251**

**ELAINE JARVIK** — is a woman of numerous talents: 27 years as a writer with the local LDS Church-owned newspaper, *The Deseret News*, followed by a stint doing a few stories for *The Salt Lake Tribune*, all alongside a successful career as a playwright – her latest, "*BASED ON A TRUE STORY*," sold out before rehearsals even began. Her 10-minute Play *DEAD RIGHT* was produced at the 2008 Humana Festival of New American Plays and is published by Playscripts, Inc. It has been anthologized in the high school textbook, *Bedford Introduction to Literature*. *MARRY CHRISTMAS*, *RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN.*, *AN EVENING WITH TWO AWFUL MEN*, *TWO STORIES*, are among her other titles. Her full-length play, *A MAN ENTERS*, co-written with her daughter, was produced by Salt Lake Acting Company in 2011, and her play *THE COMING ICE AGE* was produced by Pygmalion Theatre in 2010. Jarvik has spent most of her writing career trying to report the facts, first for the *Deseret News* and more recently as a freelance journalist, earning national awards for reporting.

## RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN.

*(Lights up on IZZY and JJ, facing us. IZZY is wearing a backpack.)*

**IZZY:** Salutations! That's a fancy word for Hello.

**JJ:** We're going to sing you a song!

**IZZY:** These people don't have time for a song.

**JJ:** Yes they do. *(to audience)* Raise your hand if you have time for a song?  
*(to IZZY)*

See?

**IZZY:** There will be no singing today.

**JJ:** Why?

**IZZY:** I hate singing.

**JJ:** No you don't. You *like* to sing. You *love* to sing.

**IZZY:** No I don't.

**JJ:** Yes you do.

**IZZY:** Have you heard me singing lately?

**JJ:** No.

**IZZY:** See?

**JJ:** But why? Why won't you sing?

**IZZY:** Because.

**JJ:** Because why?

**IZZY:** . . .

**JJ:** Is it a secret?

**IZZY:** Look, these people don't have all day.

**JJ:** Why don't you like to sing anymore?

**IZZY:** Stop asking so many questions. *(to audience)* Salutations! My name is Izzy. Izzy is short for Isabel. I was "named after" my grandmother, which means we have the same name. Grandma Isabel moved into our house when I was 2, so that was . . . seven years ago, because I'm 9.

**JJ:** No you're not. You're 8.

**IZZY:** I'm practically 9.

**JJ:** You're 8 and a half.

**IZZY:** (*sighing; to audience*) This is my little brother JJ. He's  
(*pointedly*)

barely 5. We also have a little sister named Annie.

**JJ:** Can I tell my knock-knock joke now?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Knock-knock.

**IZZY:** Who's there?

**JJ:** Annie.

**IZZY:** Annie who?

**JJ:** Annie-body home?

**IZZY:** (*to audience*) So, as I was saying

**JJ:** Can I tell another knock-knock joke?

**IZZY:** Our agreement was one joke.

**JJ:** No it wasn't.

**IZZY:** Okay. But only one more joke. These people are in a hurry.

**JJ:** Knock-knock.

**IZZY:** Who's there?

**JJ:** Isabel.

**IZZY:** Isabel who?

**JJ:** Isabel broken? I'm ringing it and no one answers...  
(*to the audience*)

Isabel is my grandmother.

**IZZY:** I already told them that.

**JJ:** You said Grandma Isabel is *your* Grandma. You didn't say she's *my* Grandma.

**IZZY:** We have the same Grandma.

**JJ:** But I'm Grandma favorite.

**IZZY:** No you're not.

**JJ:** Am too.

**IZZY:** Are not.

**JJ:** She loves me 500 million.

**IZZY:** (*to audience*) Pffff. This is what I call *outlandish*, which is a fancy word for making something sound bigger than it really is. *Outlandish* is one of my favorite fancy words. Some of my other favorites

are *scallywag*, which is a fancy word for someone who makes trouble  
(a glance at JJ)

and *humdrum*, which is a fancy word for *boring*. I am never *humdrum*. I am always *spectacular*, which is a fancy word for really, really *awesome*.

**JJ:** If these people are in a hurry, why are you talking so much?

**IZZY:** (ignoring JJ; to audience) Today I want to tell you about something that happened at our house.

**JJ:** Our Grandma died.

**IZZY:** Don't tell them that yet!

**JJ:** Why?

**IZZY:** Because we have to tell them how first she got sick. And then she was sick for a long time. And *then* she died. You have to tell it in order.

**JJ:** Why?

**IZZY:** Because. (to audience) And now we're going on a journey.

**JJ:** Who?

**IZZY:** Us. You and me. And these people here. They're going to come with us.  
(to the audience)

Raise your hand if you want to come with us on our journey.

**JJ:** But *why* are we going on a journey?

**IZZY:** Mom says that when someone dies you always go on a journey.  
(to the audience)

A journey is sort of like a trip but it's more . . .

(she tries to think of the word)

**JJ:** Exciting?

**IZZY:** Yes. But also more . . .

**JJ:** Weird?

**IZZY:** No! A journey is more . . . *momentous*, which is a fancy word for big and important. That's because when you come back home from a *journey* you're different from when you left.

**JJ:** Will I be taller?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** (clearly disappointed) Oh. . . Will I be older?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Hooray!

**IZZY:** (to the audience in a stage whisper) If the journey takes 20 minutes he'll be 20 minutes older.

**JJ:** What did you just tell them?

**IZZY:** Nothing. I was “clearing my throat.”

*(SHE clears her throat) (to audience)*

Raise your hand if you’re ready to go with us on our journey...Okay, here we go!

**JJ:** Wait!! Wait, wait, wait, wait. I never said *I* want to go on a journey.

**IZZY:** Don’t you want to find the thing at the end of the journey?

**JJ:** What thing?

**IZZY:** Mom said that when you go on a journey you always find something magical at the end.

**JJ:** A treasure?

**IZZY:** *(Uncertain, bluffing)* . . . Yes!

**JJ:** A treasure chest full of gold coins?

**IZZY:** Probably.

**JJ:** Will I get to wear a pirate hat?

**IZZY:** Yes.

*(SHE opens her backpack and takes out two pirate hats and two cardboard insides of paper towel rolls.*

Here you go. One hat. And one telescope. I also have a flashlight for later, for exploring secret caves.

**JJ:** There’s going to be a secret cave?

**IZZY:** Probably. Sometimes treasures are buried in secret caves.

*(THEY put on their hats.)*

Let’s go!

*(SHE begins marching, pulling JJ along with her. THEY march and look through their telescopes.)*

**IZZY:** We’re going on a journey, with a telescope and light  
We’re going on a journey, but we won’t stay overnight  
We’ll be back before you know it, in 30 minutes — or less!  
Because we know that you have things to do, like reading

**JJ:** And recess!

**IZZY:** We’re going on a journey, and we don’t know what’s in store  
We’re going on a journey, to places we’ll explore.  
And who knows where we’ll end up, or whether there’ll be bears  
Or lions or monsters, so I’m warning you: Beware!

**JJ:** Did you say *bears*?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** And lions?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** And monsters?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** I want to go home.

**IZZY:** We can't turn back now!

**JJ:** Why not?

**IZZY:** Because we just crossed a bridge.

**JJ:** We did?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** So let's cross back over the bridge and go home.

**IZZY:** Heroes never go back before the journey is over.

**JJ:** We're *heroes*?

**IZZY:** Yes. We're the heroes of this journey.

**JJ:** But I don't want to find any bears.

**IZZY:** I said *maybe* there will be bears. And maybe not.

**JJ:** Can we sing a song?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** I feel braver when I'm singing. We could sing a hero song.

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** Why not?

**IZZY:** I already told you: No songs today. Just keep marching.

**JJ:** Are we superheroes or just plain old heroes?

**IZZY:** Superheroes.

**JJ:** Can I wear a superhero cape?

**IZZY:** Yes.

*(SHE opens her backpack and pulls out superhero capes for both of them.)*

And now we're off to find the treasure!

*(SHE pulls JJ along; they march and look through their telescopes.)*

**JJ:** Izzy?

**IZZY:** Yes?

**JJ:** Are we looking for Grandma?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** But maybe she's in trouble. Maybe a bear is going to get her. Maybe that's why we're superheroes — to save Grandma from a bear.

**IZZY:** A bear isn't going to get her.

**JJ:** Because there are no bears here?

**IZZY:** No, because Grandma died. There was a funeral. Remember?

**JJ:** Yes, but now we might need to save her from a bear. We might need to find her and save her.

**IZZY:** We can't save her if she already died.

**JJ:** Why not?

**IZZY:** Because.

**JJ:** Maybe we should call her.

**IZZY:** We can't call her.

**JJ:** Why?

**IZZY:** Grandma can't talk to us anymore. When you're dead you can't talk anymore. You can't do anything.

**JJ:** Are you sure?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** But then how will she make me a piñata for my birthday party?

**IZZY:** She won't.

*(Suddenly JJ runs away.)*

Where are you going? The journey is this way.

**JJ:** I'm going back to when Grandma wasn't dead.

**IZZY:** We can't do that.

**JJ:** Yes we can.

**IZZY:** It doesn't work that way.

**JJ:** You're a big meanie.

**IZZY:** Look! Over there!

**JJ:** Where?

**IZZY:** Look through your telescope. There's a boat. Hurry!

*(SHE pulls JJ toward the boat [use whatever you have, perhaps a bench].)*

We're going on a journey by land and bridge and water.

We're gonna to do everything that superheroes oughta.  
We're going on a journey to a far and distant shore  
So it's good we have a telescope — that turns into an oar!

**JJ:** Wait!

**IZZY:** Quick! Get in before the boat floats away.

*(THEY climb into the boat.)*

Start paddling!

*(THEY both begin paddling furiously. And continue paddling during the following.)*

**JJ:** Where are we?

**IZZY:** I don't know. But there's a lot of water.

**JJ:** Is it a river?

*(RIVER rushes onto the stage.)*

**RIVER:** A rushing river!

*(RIVER rushes around the stage, and continues to rush around during the following:)*

**JJ:** Who are *you*?

**RIVER:** I just told you.

**IZZY:** Paddle vigorously! *(to audience)* Vigorously is a fancy word for when you do something with lots of energy.

**RIVER:** *(to JJ)* Do you know how to swim?

**JJ:** No. Grandma was going to teach me but she died.

**RIVER:** That's sad.

**IZZY:** Grandma taught *me* how to swim.

**JJ:** That's not fair.

**RIVER:** Definitely not fair.

**IZZY:** *(to RIVER)* I'm practically 9 and he's only 5.

**JJ:** I miss Grandma.

*(JJ begins to cry. HE looks over the side of the boat.)*

My tear just fell into the river.

**RIVER:** No problemo! My river is *full* of tears — from all the people whose grandmothers have died.  
That's why I'm such a big, rushing river.

**IZZY:** Because lots of grandmothers have died.

**JJ:** How many?

**RIVER:** Three bazillion.

**IZZY:** *Bazillion* is not an actual number.

**JJ:** Who else's grandmother died?

**IZZY:** Lucy's.

**JJ:** That's only *one* grandmother.

**IZZY:** Also Mom and Dad's grandmothers.

**JJ:** Mom and Dad had grandmothers?!

**RIVER:** Everybody has grandmothers. Even the grandmothers had grandmothers. And those grandmothers had grandmothers. And *those* grandmothers had grandmothers. All the way back to the beginning of grandmothers. That's why I'm the longest river in the world.

**JJ:** Grandma says that the longest river in the world is called The Nile. Which is a river in Egypt.

**RIVER:** Yes, but, *I'm* really the longest

**JJ:** Are we in Egypt now?

**IZZY:** No, Egypt is in Africa, which is all the way across the ocean. We can't paddle across the ocean in this little boat.

**JJ:** Grandma told me she wished she could go to Egypt...Maybe that's where she is! Maybe she's in Egypt! Maybe we should go to Egypt and find her!

**IZZY:** Grandma is not in Egypt. Grandma died.

**JJ:** I wish we could paddle to Egypt and Grandma would be there.

*(JJ cries again.)*

Izzy?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Why aren't you crying?

**IZZY:** Some people cry when they're sad and some people don't.

**RIVER:** Either way is fine. Although of course I like it better when people cry.

**JJ:** Izzy?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** I'm tired of being in this boat.

**IZZY:** Then let's get out!

**RIVER:** Hey! Wait! Don't leave!

*(THEY jump out of the boat.)*

**JJ:** Yay! We're on land again!

*(RIVER rushes off to find another sad person. JJ begins twirling with happiness. IZZY twirls too. THEY twirl and giggle and shout for joy. Like all kids who are grieving, they don't stay sad. And*

*they don't stay happy either. It's a jumble of changing of emotions that sometimes confuses the grown-ups around them.)*

Let's sing a happy song!

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** But I'm happy that we're on land again! I like to sing when I'm happy.

*(THEY twirl some more.)*

Why can't we sing?

**IZZY:** Because.

**JJ:** Because of Grandma?

**IZZY:** Stop asking so many questions.

*(Because they are sometimes happy and sometimes sad, IZZY and JJ are now suddenly sad again. THEY collapse onto the ground.)*

**JJ:** I miss Grandma.

**IZZY:** Me too.

**JJ:** I feel sad again.

*(THEY're sad together. Then IZZY jumps up, pulling JJ up too.)*

**IZZY:** Come on, we need to find Grandma's treasure!

We're going on a journey, so grab your telescope.

We don't know what will happen, although I really hope

It's nothing very icky or sickening or gross

Like a monster who's ugly and smelly and verbose.

*Verbose* is a fancy word for *talkative*, which is a fancy word for saying more words than you need to.

**JJ:** Like you?

**IZZY:** Keep walking.

**JJ:** Did you say we're going to see a "monster?"

**IZZY:** I said I hope not.

**JJ:** Can we sing a song that keeps scary monsters away?

**IZZY:** Nope.

**JJ:** Where do you think we are?

**IZZY:** Just keep walking.

*(THEY walk some more. Eventually it's clear that they have walked into something sticky and clingy. Mossy. Dark. Lots of twisted vines underneath and overhead. They can hardly lift their feet. SWAMP creeps up on them and begins pulling at their arms and legs.)*

**JJ:** Izzy, what's happening?

**IZZY:** I don't know.

**JJ:** I can't lift my feet.

**IZZY:** There's something sticking to my shoes!

**JJ:** The vines are twisting around my arms!

*(THEY try to get rid of SWAMP, but SWAMP keeps tugging at them.)*

I can't get them off!

**IZZY:** I hate this!

**JJ:** Where are we?

**IZZY:** A stupid swamp.

**SWAMP:** *(to the audience)* Stupid?! I'm not stupid!

**JJ:** *(to IZZY)* This is your fault!

**IZZY:** No it's not!

**JJ:** I never wanted to come on this stupid journey. I hate you!

**SWAMP:** *(to IZZY)* He hates you!

**IZZY:** I hate you more!

**SWAMP:** *(to JJ)* She hates you more!

**JJ:** I hate everything!

**IZZY:** I hate everything more than you hate everything.

**SWAMP:** *(to the audience)* They're angry and they hate everything! Yay!

**JJ:** I want to kick a door!

**IZZY:** I want to kick two doors!

**SWAMP:** We need to find them some doors to kick!

**JJ:** I want to kick a door more than you want to kick a door!

**IZZY:** No you don't!

**JJ:** Yes I do! Because Grandma won't be here to make a piñata for my birthday party!

**SWAMP:** *(to the audience)* Now they're really mad!

**IZZY:** Nobody at school knows how much I miss Grandma, and that makes me really angry!

**SWAMP:** Aauugghh!

**JJ:** Grandma taught *you* how to ride a bike and she won't teach me because she's dead and dead people can't teach people how to ride a bike and that's not fair!

**IZZY:** Aauugghh!

**SWAMP:** Aauugghh!

**JJ:** Aauugghh!

*(This is the place of powerful feelings, sometimes feelings with no words, a swamp-like place where their bodies express their anger and hurt. IZZY and JJ thrash and twist, stuck in the stickiness but moving wildly, as SWAMP wrestles them. They fight each other with their cardboard swords. They're angry and they don't know why. This can be almost like a dance. A stomping, angry, stuck-in-the-mud dance. Maybe IZZY pulls a piece of metal and a stick from her backpack and beats on it; JJ holds his ears and then grabs the metal and the stick from her and beats even louder. Finally:)*

**IZZY:** STOP!

*(JJ stops.)*

We need to get out of here!

**SWAMP:** No you don't! You need to stay!

**JJ:** How do we get out of here?

**IZZY:** I don't know!

**JJ:** I wish Grandma was here. She'd know what to do.

**IZZY:** Well she's not!

*(JJ takes a deep breath and counts to ten on his fingers.)*

**SWAMP:** *(to the audience, alarmed)* What's he doing?

**IZZY:** What are you doing?

**JJ:** I'm taking a deep breath and counting to 10. Like Grandma always told us to do when we feel all fussed up.

**SWAMP:** No! Stop!

*(SWAMP tries to keep JJ from taking deep breaths but JJ pulls away, takes another deep breath and counts to ten on his fingers.)*

**JJ:** Look!

*(HE's able to walk more easily now. SWAMP tries to grab his legs but is unable to. Now IZZY takes a deep breath and counts to ten. IZZY and JJ breathe and count and walk. Eventually there are fewer and fewer vines and fewer sticky places. THEY have escaped SWAMP, who tries to run after them but can't find them. SWAMP exits, still searching.)*

Do you still have sticky things on you?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** Me either!

*(THEY give each other high fives.)*

It was scary in there. Were you scared?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** You looked like you were scared.

**IZZY:** Keep walking.

**JJ:** My feelings were so *big* in there. It scared me how big they were.

**IZZY:** A fancy word for big is *humungous*.

**JJ:** Is it okay to have feelings that are big?

**IZZY:** Grandma said it is. She said all feelings are okay to have.

**JJ:** Even if I want to kick a door?

**IZZY:** Yes. But you shouldn't actually kick a door.

**JJ:** What if I want to punch someone?

**IZZY:** Then you should punch a pillow.

**JJ:** What if I don't have a pillow?

**IZZY:** Then take a deep breath and count to ten — and when you get home, punch a pillow.

**JJ:** And can I throw ice cubes on the driveway and smash them into tiny bits?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Let's go home and do that!

**IZZY:** But we haven't found the treasure yet.

*(SHE pulls JJ along.)*

**8 more pages to the end of the 6-character version**

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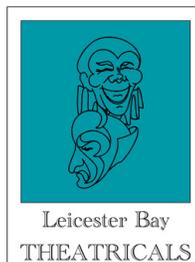
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**RIVER. SWAMP. CAVE. MOUNTAIN.** by Elaine Jarvik received its world premiere October 13- November 18, 2017 as Plan-B Theatre Company's Fifth Annual Free Elementary School Tour, funded in part by an ArtWorks grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Directed by Cheryl Cluff, stage managed by Sarah Meservy and designed by Aaron Swenson (costumes and artwork). Featuring Ashley Marian Ramos as Izzy and Benjamin Young as JJ.

## **CHARACTERS**

**IZZY**— Age 8, a talkative know-it-all who doesn't know it all

**JJ**— Age 5, her brother, who has lots of questions

## **SETTING**

Here and lots of other wondrous and fearsome places

**RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN.** by Elaine Jarvik 1f 1m [running time 30 minutes] This is based on the true story of five-year-old JJ (who has lots of questions) and eight-year-old Izzy (a know-it-all who doesn't know it all), siblings who have recently lost their grandmother. They embark on a funny and touching hero's journey to try to make sense of loss, grief, death and life. Exploring this timely topic with humor and heart, everyone learns of resiliency and "sticky" emotions, while being able to see themselves reflected in these characters and draw support and strength from their experience with the play. **ORDER #3251**

**ELAINE JARVIK** — is a woman of numerous talents: 27 years as a writer with the local LDS Church-owned newspaper, *The Deseret News*, followed by a stint doing a few stories for *The Salt Lake Tribune*, all alongside a successful career as a playwright – her latest, "*BASED ON A TRUE STORY*," sold out before rehearsals even began. Her 10-minute Play *DEAD RIGHT* was produced at the 2008 Humana Festival of New American Plays and is published by Playscripts, Inc. It has been anthologized in the high school textbook, *Bedford Introduction to Literature*. *MARRY CHRISTMAS*, *RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN.*, *AN EVENING WITH TWO AWFUL MEN*, *TWO STORIES*, are among her other titles. Her full-length play, *A MAN ENTERS*, co-written with her daughter, was produced by Salt Lake Acting Company in 2011, and her play *THE COMING ICE AGE* was produced by Pygmalion Theatre in 2010. Jarvik has spent most of her writing career trying to report the facts, first for the *Deseret News* and more recently as a freelance journalist, earning national awards for reporting.

## **RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN.**

**IZZY:** Salutations! That's a fancy word for Hello.

**JJ:** We're going to sing you a song.

**IZZY:** These people don't have time for a song.

**JJ:** Yes they do.

*(to audience)*

Raise your hand if you have time for a song?

*(to IZZY)*

See?

**IZZY:** There will be no singing today.

**JJ:** Why?

**IZZY:** I hate singing.

**JJ:** No you don't. You like to sing. You love to sing.

**IZZY:** No I don't.

**JJ:** Yes you do.

**IZZY:** Have you heard me singing lately?

**JJ:** No.

**IZZY:** See?

**JJ:** But why? Why won't you sing?

**IZZY:** Because.

**JJ:** Because why?

**IZZY:** ...

**JJ:** Is it a secret?

**IZZY:** Look, these people don't have all day.

**JJ:** Why don't you like to sing anymore?

**IZZY:** Stop asking so many questions.

*(to audience)*

Salutations! My name is Izzy. Izzy is short for Isabel. I was named after my grandmother, which means we have the same name. Grandma Isabel moved into our house when I was two, so that was ... seven years ago, because I'm nine.

**JJ:** No you're not. You're eight.

**IZZY:** I'm practically nine.

**JJ:** You're eight-and-a-half.

**IZZY:** (*sighing; to audience*) This is my little brother JJ. He's  
(*pointedly*)

barely five. We also have a little sister named Annie.

**JJ:** Can I tell my knock-knock joke now?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Knock-knock.

**IZZY:** Who's there?

**JJ:** Annie.

**IZZY:** Annie who?

**JJ:** Annie-body home?

**IZZY:** (*to audience*) So, as I was saying

**JJ:** Can I tell another knock-knock joke?

**IZZY:** Our agreement was one joke.

**JJ:** No it wasn't.

**IZZY:** Okay. But only one more joke. These people are in a hurry.

**JJ:** Knock-knock.

**IZZY:** Who's there?

**JJ:** Isabel.

**IZZY:** Isabel who?

**JJ:** Isabel broken? I'm ringing it and no one answers ...

(*to audience*)

Isabel is my grandmother.

**IZZY:** I already told them that.

**JJ:** You said Grandma Isabel is your Grandma. You didn't say she's my Grandma. **IZZY:** Brothers and sisters always have the same Grandma.

**JJ:** But I'm Grandma Isabel's favorite.

**IZZY:** No you're not.

**JJ:** Am too.

**IZZY:** Are not.

**JJ:** She loves me 500 million.

**IZZY:** (*to audience*) Pffff. This is what I call outlandish, which is a fancy word for making something sound bigger than it really is. Outlandish is one of my favorite fancy words. Some of my other favorites are scallywag, which is a fancy word for someone who makes trouble

(*A glance at JJ*)

and humdrum, which is a fancy word for boring. I am never humdrum. I am always spectacular, which is a fancy word for really, really awesome.

**JJ:** If these people are in a hurry, why are you talking so much?

**IZZY:** (*ignoring JJ; to audience*) Today I want to tell you about something that happened at our house.

**JJ:** Our Grandma died.

**IZZY:** Don't tell them that yet!

**JJ:** Why?

**IZZY:** Because we have to tell them how first she got sick. And then she was sick for a long time. And then she died. You have to tell it in order.

**JJ:** Why?

**IZZY:** Because.

(*to audience*) And now we're going on a journey.

**JJ:** Who?

**IZZY:** Us. You and me. And these people here. They're going to come with us. (*to audience*) Raise your hand if you want to come with us on our journey.

**JJ:** But what kind of journey?

**IZZY:** Mom says that when someone dies you always go on a journey.

(*to audience*) A journey is sort of like a trip but it's more ...

(*she tries to think of the word*)

**JJ:** Exciting?

**IZZY:** Yes. But also more ...

**JJ:** Weird?

**IZZY:** No! A journey is more ... momentous, which is a fancy word for big and important. That's because when you come back home from a journey you're different from when you left.

**JJ:** Will I be taller?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** (*clearly disappointed*) Oh ...Will I be older?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Hooray!

**IZZY:** (*stage whisper to audience*) If the journey takes 20 minutes he'll be 20 minutes older.

**JJ:** What did you just tell them?

**IZZY:** Nothing. I was 'clearing my throat.'

(*SHE clears her throat*)

(*to audience*) Raise your hand if you're ready to go with us on our journey ... Okay, here we go!

**JJ:** Wait!! Wait, wait, wait, wait. I never said I want to go on a journey.

**IZZY:** Don't you want to find the thing at the end of the journey?

**JJ:** What thing?

**IZZY:** Mom said that when you go on a journey you always find something magical at the end.

**JJ:** A treasure?

**IZZY:** Yes. A treasure. She said Grandma left us a treasure.

**JJ:** A treasure chest full of gold coins?

**IZZY:** I don't know. She just said 'a treasure.'

*(beat)*

**JJ:** Will I get to wear a pirate hat?

**IZZY:** Yes.

*(SHE opens her backpack and takes out two pirate hats and two cardboard insides of paper towel rolls.)*

Here you go. One hat. And one telescope. I also have a flashlight for later, for exploring secret caves.

**JJ:** There's going to be a secret cave?

**IZZY:** Probably. Sometimes treasures are buried in secret caves.

*(THEY put on their hats.)*

Let's go!

*(SHE begins marching, pulling JJ along with her. THEY march and look through their telescopes.)*

*(rhythmically)*

We're going on a journey, with a telescope and light  
We're going on a journey, but we won't stay overnight  
We'll be back before you know it, in 30 minutes or less,  
Because we know that you have things to do, like reading

**JJ:** And recess!

**IZZY:** *(rhythmically)* We're going on a journey, and we don't know what's in store

We're going on a journey, to places we'll explore.  
And who knows where we'll end up, or whether there'll be bears  
Or lions or monsters, so I'm warning you: Beware!

**JJ:** Did you say bears?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** And lions?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** And monsters?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** I want to go home.

**IZZY:** We can't turn back now!

**JJ:** Why not?

**IZZY:** Because we just crossed a bridge.

**JJ:** We did?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** So let's cross back over the bridge and go home.

**IZZY:** Heroes never go back before the journey is over.

**JJ:** We're heroes?

**IZZY:** Yes. We're the heroes of this journey.

**JJ:** But I don't want to find any bears.

**IZZY:** I said maybe there will be bears. And maybe not.

**JJ:** Can we sing a song?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** I feel braver when I'm singing. We could sing a hero song.

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** Why not?

**IZZY:** I already told you: No songs today. Just keep marching.

**JJ:** Are we superheroes or just plain old heroes?

**IZZY:** Superheroes.

**JJ:** I knew it! ... Can I wear a superhero cape?

**IZZY:** Yes.

*(SHE opens her backpack and pulls out superhero capes for both of them.)*

And now we're off to find the treasure!

*(SHE pulls JJ along; they march and look through their telescopes.)*

**JJ:** Izzy?

**IZZY:** Yes?

**JJ:** Are we looking for Grandma?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** But maybe she's in trouble. Maybe a bear is going to get her. Maybe that's why we're superheroes—to save Grandma from a bear.

**IZZY:** A bear isn't going to get her.

**JJ:** Because there're no bears here?

**IZZY:** Because Grandma died. There was a funeral. Remember?

**JJ:** Yes, but now we might need to save her from a bear. We might need to find her and save her.

**IZZY:** We can't save her if she already died.

**JJ:** Why not?

**IZZY:** Because.

**JJ:** Maybe we should call her. Just to make sure.

**IZZY:** We can't do that.

**JJ:** I brought the phone!

**IZZY:** Grandma can't talk to us on the phone. When you're dead you can't talk anymore. You can't do anything.

**JJ:** Are you sure?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** But then how will she make me a piñata for my birthday party?

**IZZY:** She won't.

*(Suddenly JJ runs away.)*

Where are you going? The journey is this way.

**JJ:** I'm going back to when Grandma wasn't dead.

**IZZY:** We can't do that.

**JJ:** Yes we can.

**IZZY:** It doesn't work that way.

**JJ:** You're a big meanie.

**IZZY:** Look! Over there!

**JJ:** Where?

**IZZY:** Look through your telescope. There's a boat. Hurry!

*(SHE pulls JJ toward the boat)*

*(rhythmically)*

We're going on a journey by land and bridge and water  
And we're going to do everything that superheroes oughta.  
We're going on a journey to a far and distant shore  
So it's good we have a telescope—that turns into an oar!

**JJ:** Wait!

**IZZY:** Quick! Get in before the boat floats away.

*(THEY climb into the boat.)*

Start paddling!

*(THEY both begin paddling furiously. And continue paddling during the following.)*

**JJ:** Where are we?

**IZZY:** I don't know. But there's a lot of water.

**JJ:** Is it a river?

**IZZY:** I don't know. Just paddle vigorously!

*(to audience)*

Vigorously is a fancy word for when you do something with lots of energy.

**JJ:** I'm glad Grandma taught me how to swim. Did she teach you how to swim?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** I was afraid to put my face in the water. But Grandma made it into a game.

**IZZY:** And Grandma taught me how to ride a bike.

**JJ:** Why didn't she teach me to ride a bike?

**IZZY:** Because you're only 5.

**JJ:** That's not fair.

**IZZY:** The first time I rode my bike all by myself without wobbling, Grandma whooped and hollered so loud that the Rodriguezes came running out of their house because they thought something was wrong.

**JJ:** Grandma was loud sometimes. I liked how loud she was ... I miss Grandma.

*(JJ begins to cry. HE looks over the side of the boat.)*

My tear just fell into the river.

**IZZY:** Keep paddling.

**JJ:** Maybe it's a river of tears.

**IZZY:** Well I doubt that.

**JJ:** Maybe it's a river of all the tears of all the people whose grandmothers have died.

**IZZY:** That would be a lot of tears. Lots of grandmothers have died.

**JJ:** How many?

**IZZY:** I don't know the exact number.

**JJ:** But who? Whose grandmother has died?

**IZZY:** ... Lucy's grandmother.

**JJ:** That's only one grandmother.

**IZZY:** ... Mom and Dad's grandmothers.

**JJ:** Mom and Dad had grandmothers?

**IZZY:** Everybody has grandmothers. Even the grandmothers had grandmothers. And those grandmothers had grandmothers. And those grandmothers had grandmothers. All the way back to ... the beginning of grandmothers.

**JJ:** Grandma told me about the longest river in the world.

**IZZY:** The Nile.

**JJ:** She told you too?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** I think this might be the Nile. And if we keep paddling we'll get to Egypt, which is a country in Africa.

**IZZY:** We can't paddle to Egypt. Egypt is all the way across the ocean. We can't paddle across the ocean.

**JJ:** Grandma told me she wished she could go to Egypt ... Maybe that's where she is! Maybe she's in Egypt!

**IZZY:** Grandma is not in Egypt. Grandma died.

**JJ:** I wish we could paddle to Egypt and Grandma would be there.

**IZZY:** Well we can't.

*(beat)*

**JJ:** Izzy?

**IZZY:** Yes?

**JJ:** Are tears the same as water?

**IZZY:** No. Tears taste like salt. Water tastes like ... water.

**JJ:** The ocean tastes like salt. Is the ocean made of tears?

**IZZY:** You ask too many questions.

*(beat)*

**JJ:** Izzy?

**IZZY:** Yes?

**JJ:** Can I ask one more question?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Does water make things grow?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Do tears make things grow?

**IZZY:** That was two questions.

**JJ:** But are tears good for something?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** What?

**IZZY:** That was four questions. If you ask too many questions we'll be here all day and never find the treasure.

**JJ:** Izzy?

**IZZY:** Are you going to ask another question?

**JJ:** I'm tired of being in this boat.

**IZZY:** Then let's get out!

*(THEY jump out of the boat.)*

**JJ:** Yay! We're on land again!

*(JJ begins twirling with happiness. IZZY twirls too. THEY twirl and giggle and shout for joy. Like all kids who are grieving, they don't stay sad. And they don't stay happy either. It's a jumble of changing of emotions that sometimes confuses the grown-ups around them.)*

Let's sing a happy song!

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** But I'm happy! I like to sing when I'm happy.

*(THEY twirl some more.)*

**JJ:** Why can't we sing?

**IZZY:** Because.

**JJ:** Because of Grandma?

**IZZY:** Stop asking so many questions.

*(Because they are sometimes happy and sometimes sad, IZZY and JJ are now suddenly sad again. THEY collapse onto the ground.)*

**JJ:** I miss Grandma.

**IZZY:** Me too.

**JJ:** Is it okay to feel sad?

**IZZY:** Yes. A big, sad thing happened to us, so we can feel big, sad feelings.

*(THEY're sad together. Then IZZY jumps up, pulling JJ up too.)*

Come on, we need to find Grandma's treasure!

*(Rhythmically)*

We're going on a journey, so grab your telescope.  
We don't know what will happen, although I really hope  
It's nothing very icky or sickening or gross  
Like a monster who's ugly and smelly and verbose.

Verbose is a fancy word for talkative, which is a fancy word for saying more words than you need to.

**JJ:** Like you?

**IZZY:** Keep walking.

**JJ:** Did you say we're going to see a 'monster'?

**IZZY:** I said I hope not.

**JJ:** Can we sing a song that keeps scary monsters away?

**IZZY:** Nope.

**JJ:** Where do you think we are?

**IZZY:** Just keep walking.

*(THEY walk some more. Eventually it's clear that they have walked into something sticky and clingy. Mossy. Dark. Lots of twisted vines underneath and overhead. They can hardly lift their feet.)*

**JJ:** Izzy, what's happening? Where did all these creepy vines come from?

**IZZY:** I don't know.

**JJ:** I can't lift my feet.

**IZZY:** There's something sticking to my shoes.

**JJ:** Ew! It's sticking to my arms!

*(THEY pull at whatever it is that's sticking to them, but they can't get it off.)*

I can't get the sticky stuff off.

**IZZY:** I hate this!

**JJ:** Where are we?

**IZZY:** A stupid swamp.

**JJ:** This is your fault!

**IZZY:** No it's not!

**JJ:** I never wanted to come on this stupid journey. I hate you!

**IZZY:** I hate you more!

**JJ:** I hate everything!

**IZZY:** I hate everything more than you hate everything.

**JJ:** I want to kick a door!

**IZZY:** I want to kick two doors!

**JJ:** I want to kick a door more than you want to kick a door!

**IZZY:** No you don't!

**JJ:** Yes I do! Because Grandma won't be here to make a piñata for my birthday party!

**IZZY:** Nobody at school knows how much I miss Grandma, and that makes me really angry!

**JJ:** Grandma taught you how to ride a bike and she won't teach me because she's dead and dead people can't teach people how to ride a bike and that's not fair!

**IZZY:** Auggghh!

**JJ:** Augggghhhhh!

*(This is the place of powerful feelings, sometimes feelings with no words, a swamp-like place where their bodies express their anger and hurt. IZZY and JJ thrash and twist, stuck in the mud but moving wildly. They're angry and they don't know why. This can be almost like a dance. A stomping, angry, stuck-in-the-mud dance. IZZY pulls a metal water bottle and a stick from her backpack and beats on it; JJ holds his ears and then grabs the metal and the stick from her and beats even louder.)*

**IZZY:** STOP! We need to get out of here!

**JJ:** How?

**IZZY:** I don't know! Augghhhhh.

**JJ:** I wish Grandma was here. She'd know what to do.

**IZZY:** Well she's not!

*(JJ thinks this over. Then HE takes a deep breath and counts to ten on HIS fingers.)* **IZZY:** What are you doing?

**JJ:** I'm taking a deep breath and counting to 10. Like Grandma always told us to do when we feel all fussed up.

*(Then HE takes another deep breath and counts to ten on HIS fingers.)*

Look!

*(HE's able to walk more easily now. IZZY takes a deep breath and counts to ten. IZZY and JJ breathe and count and walk. Eventually there are fewer and fewer vines and fewer sticky places.)*

Do you still have sticky things on you?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** Me either!

*(THEY give each other high fives.)*

It was scary in there. Were you scared?

**IZZY:** No.

**JJ:** You looked like you were scared.

**IZZY:** Keep walking.

**JJ:** My feelings were so big in there. It scared me how big they were.

**IZZY:** A fancy word for big is humungous.

**JJ:** Is it okay to have feelings that are big?

**IZZY:** Grandma said it is. She said all feelings are okay to have.

**JJ:** Even if I want to kick a door?

**IZZY:** Yes. But you shouldn't actually kick a door.

**JJ:** What if I want to punch someone?

**IZZY:** Then you should punch a pillow.

**JJ:** What if I don't have a pillow?

**IZZY:** Then take a deep breath and count to ten, and when you get home, punch a pillow.

**JJ:** And can I throw ice cubes on the driveway and smash them into tiny bits?

**IZZY:** Yes.

**JJ:** Let's go home and do that!

**IZZY:** But we haven't found the treasure yet.

*(SHE pulls JJ along.)*

**8 more pages to the end of the 2-character version**



## **AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

### **Elaine Jarvik:**

I volunteer at The Sharing Place, a support group for children who are grieving the death of someone close to them. Perhaps that makes it sound like I'm the kind of person who can walk into a funeral home and not get weak in the knees. But, in fact, I am still at some level a grown-up version of the child who could barely walk past the Funk and Wagnall's encyclopedias on our hallway bookshelf because one of the "B" entries was "blood."

I grew up in a family of fearful people who were adept at skirting painful topics, and that definitely included death and dying. After my grandmother died when I was 7, my parents took a train to Raleigh and left me at home in Maryland with a relative, then came back and, as far as I remember, her death was never mentioned again. What I did understand, though—what I picked up on from what wasn't said—was that death was scary and feelings shouldn't be expressed.

So I think I am just the right person to write a play for children that explores death and grief—because I sure wish someone had put on that play for me when I was a kid.

That doesn't mean, though, that I knew where to begin. Sure, I had written plays about death before, but mostly these have been plays that hid behind gallows humor: a woman afraid of what her survivors might write in her obituary; two sisters at odds over whether to honor their father's wishes to have his ashes left at his favorite pie restaurant; a couple in some afterlife watching their daughter read from a memoir that reveals too much. This play for children, though—I wanted it to be fanciful and funny but most of all honest, a play that explored the questions kids have, and the questions they don't even know to ask.

Before I began writing in earnest, I met with a friend of mine, Nancy Reiser, who is a child psychologist who helped start The Sharing Place two decades ago. I told her that I thought I would take my young audience on a journey, and she said that was perfect. "Grieving is always a journey," she said.

I also talked with Jill Macfarlane, program director of The Sharing Place, and together she and Nancy helped me understand what 5-, 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds—our future audience of kindergartners through third-graders—knew and could absorb about death and loss. The littlest ones couldn't really grasp the finality; the older ones got the bigger picture but could easily be confused about whether they were to blame if a parent or sibling died. Or, if they had never personally experienced a close death—probably most of the kids in our audiences—all of it could be a big mystery.

I hope that [RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN](#) will provide some answers. I hope children will leave each performance feeling less confused and more certain that life is a treasure. I hope that if someone they know experiences a death they won't be afraid to listen and talk. I hope they will go home and tell their parents about the play, and that a real conversation can begin.