

ONE LIFE

A short play

by Mark Cornell

Mark Cornell
310-738-0796
markcornell53@yahoo.com

One Life

By Mark Cornell

Characters:

LUKE, male, 30s

Chorus: ACTION, male, 40s

THOUGHT, male, 60s

FEELING, female, 20s

Setting:

The world.

Time:

The course of a lifetime.

Note- The character of LUKE should mime all of his action (except for one moment at the end). There should be no props. The chorus should, whenever necessary, represent the other characters they describe in their narration, or convey, in a broad sense, that those characters are present. They should not stand and talk. They should be active. The play, then, becomes very fluid, almost like a choreographed dance.

A bare stage. A man, LUKE, lies in a fetal position. Around him are ACTION, THOUGHT, and FEELING.

ACTION

You are born on September 16, 1964 in a hospital on a hill in Fairfield, California.

LUKE sits up, dizzy and cold.

ACTION (cont'd)

You arrive two minutes after your identical twin brother. You are disoriented, cold, and your umbilical cord is wrapped around your neck.

LUKE chokes.

FEELING

This is highly upsetting. So you cry. For 12 straight days.

LUKE cries.

ACTION

Your mother names you Luke, and your brother, John. You are baptized in a beautiful, but morose Catholic Church.

LUKE looks a little frightened.

FEELING

The ceremony gives you strange feelings of guilt.

ACTION

You crap a lot.

LUKE grimaces.

FEELING

You enjoy crapping.

LUKE smiles, then rises to his feet.

THOUGHT

Your mother is obsessive-compulsive and likes to dress you and your brother in matching clothes.

LUKE looks down at his clothes.
"Mom?!"

FEELING

You hate this. So does your brother. It makes you both feel like you have no individual identity.

ACTION

School is mostly a bore, but you're a good athlete, especially in baseball and basketball.

LUKE mimes playing baseball and basketball.

FEELING

It gives you feelings of self-worth...

LUKE puffs out his chest.

ACTION

...even though your father pushes you, and belittles you, and humiliates you to win at all costs.

LUKE deflates.

THOUGHT

From Catholicism, you learn how to stifle yourself and, at the same time, be judgmental of others.

LUKE wags a finger.

FEELINGS

Your eyes open for the first time when a pony-tailed girl in the third grade calls you a "stuck up turd."

THOUGHT

From your brother, you learn to laugh.

LUKE "laughs."

ACTION

You show an interest in writing. Your brother in painting. These artistic pursuits completely baffle your parents.

FEELING

Your mother just wants you to be a good Catholic boy. Your father wants you to "be a man."

LUKE clasps his hands in prayer. Then makes two strong fists.

ACTION

As you grow up, no one can tell you and your brother apart. People ask questions like "when you wake up in the morning, do you know who you are?"

LUKE folds his arms, annoyed.

THOUGHT

You begin to realize that being a twin can sometimes make others seem very stupid.

ACTION

Your father is a mechanic in the Air Force and the family moves wherever he is stationed. Ohio, Kansas, Kentucky, Thailand, and back to California.

LUKE makes like a plane.

ACTION (cont'd)

You make friends, you lose friends.

LUKE mouths "hello," then waves "goodbye."

FEELING

You feel your only true friend is your brother.

ACTION

No one comes between you and your brother. Not even girls.

LUKE puts up a hand, as if to say "stop."

ACTION (cont'd)

When you are 16, your father is dishonorably discharged for assaulting a superior officer. Lost, and full of drink, he deserts the family.

LUKE looks for his father. Then stops.

THOUGHT

You never think of him again.

ACTION

You go to four different colleges before graduating from UCLA with a degree in English. You're the only one in your family to graduate from college.

LUKE walks up to get his "diploma."

THOUGHT

You are proud of yourself, but you think all the other students are smarter than you.

ACTION

Your first real job is in a library. Most of your co-workers are sociopaths.

LUKE shelves "books," worried.

ACTION (cont'd)

You marry a half-Japanese financial analyst when you are 26. She is a pit bull in heels.

LUKE runs for cover.

ACTION (cont'd)

You divorce within three years.

FEELING

The most hurtful thing she says to you is the last thing she says, which is "Luke, you were a disappointment."

ACTION

You move back in with your mother, who now lives in San Francisco. She is good to you...

LUKE slings a "bag" over his shoulder and walks, as if traveling.

FEELING

...but it takes you one solid year to feel like you can breathe.

LUKE takes a deep breath.

ACTION

You get a job writing high school sports for a small, North Bay paper.

LUKE takes notes as if doing an interview.

THOUGHT

You're inspired by young dreamers with big dreams.

ACTION

You write your first play at 30-years old. It's about baseball.

LUKE types, excited.

FEELING

It's the most exciting thing you've experienced in years.

ACTION

Theater people like it.

LUKE accepts congratulations.

THOUGHT

But you know it is limited. Because you are limited.

ACTION

It never gets produced.

LUKE is disappointed.

FEELING

Still, you feel you are at the beginning of something new and amazing.

ACTION

You go back to UCLA for graduate school in playwriting. Your artistic output is staggering. But success dodges you.

LUKE writes furiously.

FEELING

You do not lose hope, though. Writing gives you a purpose.

ACTION

You get a job in marketing at a major regional theatre in L.A.

LUKE introduces a "marquee sign."

FEELING

But being so close to the action, without participating, is both a blessing, and a curse.

LUKE pines.

FEELING (cont'd)

You fall in love with a Quaker girl from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

LUKE touches his heart.

THOUGHT

She is red-headed and beautiful and smart, but you mistakenly believe you can make her happy.

ACTION

But you really, really try. You get married in Maine and the two of you dream of one day living there.

LUKE smiles, walks down the "aisle."

ACTION (cont'd)

You move, instead, to Chapel Hill, North Carolina, when she is offered a faculty position at UNC.

LUKE starts a new life.

ACTION (cont'd)

You have your first and only child at the age of 36. It's a boy. He craps a lot.

LUKE beats his chest like Tarzan.

THOUGHT

He seems to like to crap a lot.

ACTION

You stay home with him.

LUKE paces, rocking a "child."

FEELING

It overwhelms you.

ACTION

Your son won't eat or sleep. He gets very sick. He looks like he's going to die. But he rallies.

LUKE frets, then rejoices.

THOUGHT

And it briefly restores your faith in all things.

ACTION

But he is forever delayed, and out of sync.

FEELING

Still, you treasure his innocence.

LUKE marvels.

THOUGHT

Your son has no idea what the words "war" and "gun" mean. He doesn't know about swear words, or loneliness, or heartache. Even at nine-years old, he still believes in Santa Claus with all his heart.

ACTION

So much so that your family celebrates Christmas all year long.

FEELING

Sometimes you feel he is the luckiest kid in the world.

LUKE smiles.

ACTION

You write a great play just after your mother passes. The play is about her.

THOUGHT

For the first time as a playwright, you tell the truth.

ACTION

The play goes to New York and gets a spectacular review in the *New York Times*.

LUKE is in awe of New York City.

THOUGHT

At 48 years old, you think you have finally arrived.

FEELING

You are beaming.

ACTION

But you never write another great play, because the truth, for you, is elusive.

LUKE turns away, into "obscurity."

ACTION (cont'd)

Your son drifts through life. He has few friends. He gets into drugs. One day, he falls asleep at the wheel on a back-country road. And dies. He is only 19 years old.

LUKE covers his face.

FEELING

The grief is paralyzing.

ACTION

Your fifties are a blur.

THOUGHT

You and your wife spend years in denial.

LUKE wanders, like a zombie.

FEELING

When you come out of it, indefinable regrets haunt you. You begin to miss your brother.

LUKE turns towards his "brother."

THOUGHT

And at the age of 61, you realize the two of you have not lived in the same state in 35 years.

ACTION

You go to visit him in Florida. He is a massively successful realist painter.

FEELING

There is not, and has never been, any jealousy between the two of you.

ACTION

You play a lot of really bad golf together.

LUKE golfs. Badly.

THOUGHT

You discover how to laugh again.

LUKE "laughs."

ACTION

You come home to find your wife in the hospital after a breakdown. You stay by her side for three years. One October night, she tells you you were the love of her life. The next morning, she does not wake up.

After getting to his knees, as if at her bedside, LUKE stands, in shock.

FEELING

Her death leaves you numb.

THOUGHT

You don't know what to feel. Hoping to fill the emptiness...

ACTION

...you move to Maine.

LUKE drives a "truck."

FEELING

It is an old dream, and you are an old man, and you feel lost and alone there.

LUKE turns in many directions.

ACTION

You move to Florida and live with your brother. Sunshine, everywhere!

LUKE arrives in Florida. Sunshine!

ACTION (cont'd)

One day you run into an old UCLA professor in a cafe and he says he saw your play in New York and it changed his life.

Listening, LUKE smiles, stunned.

THOUGHT

But as he pontificates, you realize he's talking about someone else's play.

LUKE loses the smile.

ACTION

You go back to church after a long, long time away.

Now old, LUKE slowly gets on his knees.

FEELING

It is strangely comforting.

THOUGHT

You think a lot about your mother.

LUKE clasps his hands and looks up.

THOUGHT (cont'd)

Only now can you appreciate her complete devotion to you and your brother.

ACTION

You start a new play. You want to chronicle your entire life.

Rising, LUKE writes.

FEELING

You try to write the truth, but this time you discover you can't write about what hurts.

ACTION

So you don't finish the play.

LUKE pushes the play away.

ACTION (cont'd)

You engulf yourself in your brother's life.

LUKE meets and greets.

ACTION (cont'd)

But this is his life, and not yours.

LUKE is sad.

THOUGHT

And no matter how close you two may be, you are not the same person. You wonder a lot about your life, and what it all means. You wonder "what if?" You think about your innocent little boy. And that beautiful red head from Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

FEELING

And it crushes you.

ACTION

And then you and your brother go play golf. Badly.

LUKE plays golf. Badly.

FEELING

And you're happy again.

LUKE "laughs" and "laughs."

FEELING (cont'd)

Until...

ACTION

...at 81, you have a massive stroke. It doesn't kill you, but you are rendered nearly incapacitated.

LUKE seizes up, then goes still.

ACTION (cont'd)

On your birthday, your brother gets you both matching baseball uniforms, as a joke.

LUKE "laughs."

ACTION (cont'd)

You are wearing yours when a second stroke kills you on the back porch of his house.

LUKE lies down.

FEELING

You feel no pain. You only feel your brother's hand on yours.

THOUGHT

You're not even aware when it's not there anymore.

ACTION

A light comes.

FEELING

You laugh at the cliché.

LUKE makes an audible laugh. He reaches and reaches for the light.

ACTION

Something compels you to reach towards the light.

THOUGHT

And you don't know what that something is.

FEELING

And you hope, above all hopes, that wherever you're going, that one day, your brother...

THOUGHT

...and your mom...

FEELING

...and your son...

THOUGHT
...and that beautiful red head...

ALL
...will all be there, too.

LUKE lies back, clasps his hands.

Lights fade.

The End