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A Piece of My Heart

Shirley Lauro

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Full Length, Drama

Characters: 1 male, 6 female

Unit set

This is a powerful, true drama of six women who went to Viet Nam five nurses and a country western singer booked by an unscrupulous agent to entertain the troops. The play portrays each young woman before, during, and after her tour in the war torn jungle and ends as each leaves a personal token at The Wall in Washington.

A Piece of My Heart premiered in New York at Manhattan Theatre Club, and now has enjoyed over 1000 productions here and abroad. It has recently been named "The most enduring play on Vietnam in the nation," by The Vietnam Vets Association. "There have been a number of plays dealing with Viet Nam, but none with the direct, emotional impact of Ms. Lauro's work."-N.Y. Times

"Brought [the audience] to tears... and a standing ovation."-Variety

"A riveting, rending dramatic experience."-Louisville Courier Journal

A Piece of My Heart Details

Date : Published June 22nd 1992 by Samuel French Inc. (first published 1988)

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Author : Shirley Lauro

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From Reader Review A Piece of My Heart for online ebook

Debbie Raulerson says

This was a wonderful read and would be a wonderful cross-curricular class assignment. It would need a lot of shared prior knowledge as our students, I feel would not connect with some of the terms and situations. This play brought me to tears at the end as I could picture these women and men. Great job, Shirley Lauro.

Anne says

Abigail was in this play:)

SerahRose says

This was a hard one for me to rate according the GoodReads system, to be honest. On a professional level, I can see why this play is so well-loved, moving to watch (I imagine), and highly respected. It tells an untold story creatively, engagingly, and often with unexpected wit. Seeing it live, I might actually cry.

But personally, it's not my favorite kind of play. I'm not the best judge of reading plays since, even as a theatre professional, I'm not all that fond of sitting down and reading a play like a book. But I do it all the time, because one must do these things when one is in the field. But I prefer plays that have scenes enacted between people. Which electrified charge between peoples. This is not a play in the sense of watching scenes. Yes, you get to see some character development. But really, it's story-telling. It's five women telling a story that you're not sure you want to hear. And they do. Tell it. There's also a superfluous male actor that really doesn't need to be in the play. The roles he plays could very easily be played by the women already in the cast.

So...in conclusion...you should read this play. If it's performed near you, go see it. If you have a chance to work on it, go for it. But it's not the best play to simply sit down and read.

Shirley Lauro says

what the Vietnam war was truly about -- it was about all wars -- suffering, destruction, doom of innocent people

Kimberly says

So far this play has been moving.

Monica says

Since I'm in it...I guess reading it is ongoing...but the more time I spend in it, the more I love it!

Ryan Crim says

This script follows the lives of five young nurses aiding the soldiers in the Vietnam war. We see the war phase them as they experience the feelings of heart break, national pride, national anger, regret, homesick and obligation. We see their journey from home to the war to returning, suffering from memories and finally reuniting with each other at the memorial in a celebration of laughs and tears. This script is brilliantly written as it makes you feel the emotions the nurses feel and is a substantial one act play that will touch the hearts and minds of all readers or audience members. This is a must see or read.

Brenda says

Martha -- the army brat.

Maryjo Kincaid -- the performer.

Sissy -- the sheltered sweetheart.

Whitney -- the graduate.

Leeann -- the hippie.

Steele -- the pragmatist.

i.

The women go 'round and tell their stories of why they joined the war effort. Their past selves soon learn that it is nothing like they expected. They board a plane to Vietnam and are told that the Vietnamese will shoot at them the second they land. The first time that they see Vietnam from the plane, they wonder how there can be a war going on in such a beautiful place. They are fired upon and have a rough landing. The doors open and they are quickly disoriented. It had been so dark, and now there are spotlights flashing and a wave of heat and stench. Both the American soldiers and the Vietnamese are shouting orders to each other. Maryjo has to be carried off the plane by a soldier because she's so nervous.

Leeann and Sissy 'volunteer' for Cu Chi together. Maryjo and her band travel constantly, do three shows a day, & help the USO girls serve dinner. Maryjo quickly falls in love with all of the soldiers she sees.

Whitney lives in the city with some other Red Cross girls on Prostitute Row; there are Vietnamese Army Guards stationed outside her door at night and they make her uncomfortable. Martha works the night shift at the hospital, which is a series of Quonset huts. Martha is told the procedure for when the hospital is on 'red alert' -- it is on red alert most of the time -- and it is unnerving (38). Martha is expected to serve as supervisor of 300-350 patients and care for the sickest patients herself. She realizes that she is underprepared and that she doesn't have the experience for this job (39). The girls receive their orientation as a mass casualty is coming in. Sissy's first patient, Jimmy, dies while Leeann removes his boots to find that his foot is still in one (47). The girls start drinking heavily on their days off, while drinking an excess of cokes and smoking cigarettes during their shifts. They smoked pot and went out with soldiers. Leeann is invited by her friend Hank to the other side of the compound, where they have blacklights and Led Zeppelin playing. It is a welcome release; no one is talking about war or medicine, just good old food and music (53). Maryjo decides that she likes the off-limits parties, or stand-downs, where the girls are hidden on supply trucks and snuck

into the compounds. Steele prefers the formal parties where she gets to dress up and be flown to the officers' clubs in planes with guns on the sides to protect her. Whitney falls in love with a pilot named Bruce, who is angry with her for not sleeping with him and yells at her for it the night before he dies; after his death, she doesn't get involved again. Sissy is on her way to a stand-down when her boy Bill steps on a mine and dies; she blames herself for it. Leeann's boy Hank, the one with blacklights, doesn't come home and they take his day-glo posters down. She thinks that she's going to die in Vietnam. The girls feel as though they owe it to the soldiers to entertain them or even sleep with them because they're 'suffering a lot more.' Maryjo admits to being raped by some soldiers.

Christmas comes and the girls have to spread some holiday cheer. Steele calls her son to wish him a Merry Christmas. A soldier takes Sissy's picture to 'have with him out in the fields' and it makes her uncomfortable. She later sees him in the amputee ward. His limbs had been blown off. He gives her the picture that he took of her.

The girls show fondness for the Vietnamese people in their lives. Whitney's housekeeper Bien volunteers for the Red Cross. Bien's cousin helps the Vietnamese guards break into Whitney's home. A POW tries to stab Martha with a fork. Leeann watches 5 GIs die and then is ordered to try to save the 15 year old boy that killed them. He looks just like her nephew, but she can't bring herself to take care of him because he's Vietnamese. Martha and Sissy have to pry her off the boy after she tries to kill him (74).

Steele writes a report predicting the Tet offensive, but her superiors ignore it. The night of the Tet offensive, the girls shove bread and cokes down their throats and are given benzedrine by the doctors. It is a terrible evening for them. Their ward is hit and soldiers die in their hospital beds.

title: page 82

Steele is listed at number two on the enemy's "most wanted" list. Her back is injured after being attacked and Steele has her briefcase stolen.

Leeann and the rest go home (84).

ii.

The girls are so excited to be on American soil that they all kiss the ground.

The girls go home and they realize that the news is underreporting the casualties in Vietnam.

Maryjo goes shopping with a friend and is triggered by the khaki green color that seems to be present everywhere.

Leeann is harassed by anti-war protestors. She has a friend burn her bloody uniform with all her medals on it (94).

They feel like they don't fit in with their old crowd anymore.

Steele doesn't get the better assignment that she was hoping for after spending 3 years in Vietnam. She gets the same assignment that she had before she left.

Maryjo & her band are cheated out of their salary for their year in Vietnam and they split up. Martha & Leeann bounce from job to job, unsatisfied. Leeann joins the anti-Vietnam movement. Whitney's boyfriend goes back to Vietnam after spending 6 years with her. Maryjo's boyfriend starts to get violent and she's 'scared to death' of him and they break up. Sissy and her daughter suffer Agent Orange Disease. They are all suffering flashbacks as a result of their PTSD and join a support group.

Steele writes her dissertation on 'hidden periodically manifested and non-observable physical disabilities.'

Sissy becomes a born-again Christian and gets a Master's in Pastoral Psych. Martha becomes a counselor and preaches anti-war stuff. Leeann becomes a lobbyist and helps get an Agent Orange bill passed.

They attend a 5 day gathering at The Wall.
