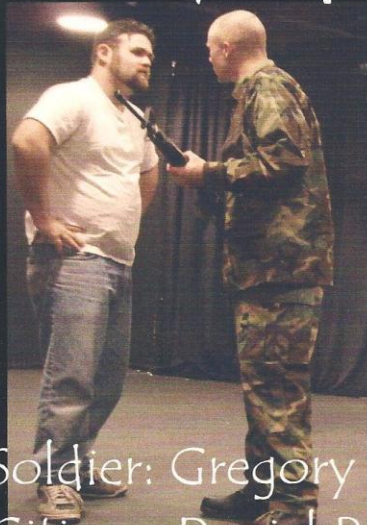


# Freedom's Last Breath

Written by  
Jackie Marx

Directed by  
Charles St. Clair



Soldier: Gregory Alkema  
Citizen: Daniel Peverini

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*Freedom's Last Breath*, a play written by Jackie Marx in 2007,  
was chosen by the Dramatists Guild of America for the New Works  
Festival 2007 (Phoenix).

DIRECTOR: Charles St. Clair.  
SOLDIER: Gregory Alkema, CITIZEN: Daniel Peverini.

This play is short and to the point. It examines the societal  
conflict between SOLDIER and CITIZEN.

When war threatens, SOLDIER readies his weapon as CITIZEN draws  
the proverbial line in the sand, in protest. *Freedom's Last  
Breath* is comprehensive and thought-provoking ... a hands-on  
(using student actors, director, tech) teaching tool brimming  
with emotion. Consider this play for Theater, History, English,  
Social Studies, etc. in a classroom setting.

See the glossary (located on the last page) for clarification of  
battles mentioned in script.

# **Freedom's Last Breath**

A short play

by

Jackie Marx

### CHARACTERS

SOLDIER, a combatant (in uniform) who takes a military stance; his emotions bubble under the surface,

CITIZEN, An agitated non-military person (in sandals and casual clothes) who wears his emotions on his sleeve.

### TIME AND PLACE

The Future,

Limbo.

Two black chairs face each other, on either side of an imaginary line. A protest sign (with the visible word killer printed in blood red) rests against one chair. The other chair holds a folded American flag.

Freedom's Last Breath

*As the scene opens, CITIZEN and SOLDIER (on opposite side of the imaginary line) are mid-conversation about the unpopular 'war' that is raging on foreign soil.*

*BOTH are resolute and passionate about their respective positions.*

SOLDIER

United we stand, divided we fall.

CITIZEN

*(stepping hard on 'divided')*

I will not abandon you.

SOLDIER

When the battle is over, and flowers once again bloom in the bloody fields--

CITIZEN

I will be there for you.

SOLDIER

As you were in the past.

CITIZEN

Of course. But, I cannot support this war.

SOLDIER

Or my involvement in it.

CITIZEN

I am torn. You are the Soldier.

SOLDIER

*(acknowledging the sign)*

Killer?

CITIZEN

This war is not just!

SOLDIER

Not Defender? Or Protector?  
Or Noble Combatant?

CITIZEN

In past wars, yes.

SOLDIER

But, not in this war.

CITIZEN

No, not in this one.

SOLDIER

I do not choose my battles.

*(pause)*

At the Normandy beachhead was I a killer? Your  
eloquent word dripping in angry red! As I inflicted  
death and destruction, spilling blood--

CITIZEN

*(on 'blood')*

No, you weren't. Not in that one.

SOLDIER

... to protect your freedoms. My words.

CITIZEN

I said no!

SOLDIER  
In the Argonne Forest?  
(*waiting*)  
On Heartbreak Ridge?

CITIZEN  
No, not then.

SOLDIER  
Saigon? Da Nang?

CITIZEN  
You protected my freedoms. Your words.

SOLDIER  
In bloody Baghdad? Kandahar?

CITIZEN  
(*immediate*)  
Those who fail to learn the lessons of history  
are destined to repeat them.

SOLDIER  
(*stepping hard on 'repeat them'*)  
Hiroshima, Nagasaki?

CITIZEN  
History has absolved you.

SOLDIER  
(*immediate*)  
I do not choose where or when to offer up  
my life.  
(*pause*)  
Or when to take someone's last breath.

CITIZEN  
And, if the cause is unjust?

SOLDIER

I take an oath to support and defend. Freely.  
Without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.

CITIZEN

You take an oath that decimates humanity!

SOLDIER

Your thoughts, your words! Openly voiced. In a Free  
Society.

CITIZEN

And, what of your deeds.

*Long beat.*

SOLDIER

Do you know your purpose on this earth?

CITIZEN

To live a long and fruitful life, I suppose.  
Just like everybody else.

SOLDIER

And my purpose is to guarantee that life for you,  
and for everybody else. At whatever the cost to me.

CITIZEN

The price is too high. This time. Is it not?

SOLDIER

I take the oath freely—

CITIZEN

*(stepping on 'freely')*

While you goose-step to their collective cadence.



SOLDIER

Politicians are fallible men and women.  
With their own agendas.

CITIZEN

What possesses you then? If not their whispers  
in your ear.

SOLDIER

*(thoughtful pause)*

Can you not taste the sweetness of your freedoms?

CITIZEN

I've never tried.

*(inhaling)*

Yes, I guess I can. Delicious.

SOLDIER

Can you feel the warm, scented breezes of  
your blessings caressing your skin?

*CITIZEN drinks in the warm,  
sweet air.*

SOLDIER *(Cont'd)*

Freedom is never free. There's always a price.

CITIZEN

*(stopping)*

Like this war.

SOLDIER

Yes! Like this war. Sometimes, wars must be waged.

CITIZEN

No. No. NO! Not this time.

*(drawing a line with his toe)*

I draw the line!

SOLDIER

You draw the line.

CITIZEN

It's a free country.

SOLDIER

Do you think that line will stop  
power-hungry dictators?

CITIZEN

Ours or theirs?

SOLDIER

Or that your sign will stop bullets and bombs?

CITIZEN

Look, if the cycle can be broken--

SOLDIER

And, if it cannot?

CITIZEN

Then we can resume the war games

*(pause)*

with you as lead pawn, if that is your  
wish. Cross my heart.

*Beat.*

SOLDIER

Why do you insult my sacrifice?

CITIZEN

Without your sacrifice, the bloodshed cannot continue.

*SOLDIER acknowledges the sign,  
as before.*

SOLDIER

Killer.

CITIZEN

I must try to stop this war somehow!

SOLDIER

And, I must continue to fight it! And, you will not abandon me if I do? Your words.

*(beat)*

When the battle is over and flowers once again bloom in the bloody fields--

CITIZEN

I will be there for you.

SOLDIER

As you were in the past.

CITIZEN

Of course.

SOLDIER

You will remember my sacrifice.

CITIZEN

You are the Soldier.

SOLDIER

And, as the soldier, my job is to fight this war. Whether you support it or not.

*CITIZEN turns away, picks up the sign and faces SOLDIER.*

*SOLDIER CONTINUES.*

SOLDIER *(Cont'd)*

My job is to stop this war before it reaches our shores. And to keep it from fouling your air.

*SOLDIER holds the flag to him.*

*Turns and faces CITIZEN.*

*SOLDIER (Cont'd)*

And, with my very last breath, I will do just that.

*(inhaling)*

With my very last breath!

*SOLDIER lets out an audible breath.*

*BLACKOUT.*

*END OF PLAY*

## GLOSSARY

ARGONNE FOREST: The Meuse-Argonne Offensive, also called the Battle of the Argonne Forest, was a part of the final Allied offensive of World War I that stretched along the entire western front.

NORMANDY BEACH: The Invasion of Normandy was the invasion and establishment of Allied forces in Normandy, France, during Operation Overlord in World War II. The invasion was the largest amphibious operation in history.

HIROSHIMA, NAGASAKI: During the final stages of World War II in 1945, the United States conducted two atomic bombings against the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan, the first on August 6, 1945 and the second on August 9, 1945. These two events are the only active deployments of nuclear weapons in war to date.

HEARTBREAK RIDGE: The Battle of Heartbreak Ridge was a month-long battle in the Korean War fought between September 13 and October 15, 1951. The Battle of Heartbreak Ridge was one of several major engagements in an area known as "The Punchbowl." The battle site is located in the hills of North Korea a few miles north of the 38th parallel north (the pre-war boundary between North and South Korea), near Chorwon.

SAIGON: (A city in Vietnam. Now Ho Chi Minh City.) The Vietnam War was a Cold War era military conflict that occurred in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. The fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975 was the final act of the war.

DA NANG: During the Vietnam War, the city was home to a major air base that was used by both the South Vietnamese and United States air forces. The base was considered one of the world's busiest airports during the war. The final U.S. ground combat operations in Vietnam ceased on August 13, 1972, when a residual force of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade stood down in Da Nang.

BAGHDAD: The capital of Iraq. In 1991 and 2003, the Gulf War and the 2003 invasion of Iraq caused significant damage to Baghdad's transportation, power, and sanitary infrastructure as the US-led coalition forces launched massive aerial assaults in the city in the two wars.

KANDAHAR: The second largest city in Afghanistan. In October 2001, as part of Operation Enduring Freedom, the United States Navy began hitting targets inside the city by precision-guided cruise missiles that were fired from the Persian Gulf.