

## Discussion Guide

# *You Don't Know the Half of It:*

A new play by Adele Finney

Presented by Public Energy and the YDK Project

February 2009

## PROCESS

*A circle conversation with people taking turns to speak, consecutively around the circle, is a good way to make sure everyone has a chance to contribute. But a post-play pub discussion suggests other seating arrangements.*

### *Post-play discussion*

1. Ask people to talk about what they particularly noticed, responded to, were attracted to, were moved by or resisted in the play.
2. The play may raise for people experiences they have had with church or questions about church they may want to talk about. It may be helpful to ask, “What did you see in the play that relates to your experience with church?” “Is it only in the church where we’ve had those experiences or asked those questions? Does this play about church raise questions for our larger society?”
3. Does a 1972 rural Ontario Anglican congregation look enough like us in this 2009 play to say something of value for the way we see one another, care for one another, and close or open doors for one another in a transitioning world?

## THEMES

Playwright Adele Finney and director Susan Spicer have spoken about working with and developing themes in “You Don’t Know the Half of It”. Your discussion may touch on some of them, or you may open discussion by leading with these examples:

### **Transition**

There is a final phase of the birth process named “transition”. It is the space in time when the birthing mother often loses control. Breathing doesn’t work anymore to keep the pain at bay. It can be a very frightening time. Second time mothers know it is also a sign that birth is imminent. Transition is the precursor of new life—a very hopeful understanding of the unasked for transitions in which we find ourselves.

*Through what sorts of transitions are the characters of “You Don’t Know the Half of It” living?*

### **Edge habitat**

Edge habitat is that place between two established ecosystems, as between a meadow and bush or shore and lake, where there is prolific growth and possibility. More species live

in edge habitat than in either adjacent ecosystem. But there is also heightened vulnerability, because at any moment what is essential for life may be taken away. Adele lived and wrote in Malaysia for five years, lived for eleven years next door to the largest food bank in Toronto, and worked for a decade in a world relief and development organization. Her experiences led to the idea of edge habitat as an integrating framework for how she understands the world we live in.

In the inner city I thought that the people we identified as “marginal” were the ones who lived in edge habitat, but I began to understand that in this transitional age we all live in that space. We are alerted to that fact when we experience the transitions of trauma, loss, death, grief, joy or gratitude.

~ Adele Finney, playwright

*How is “You Don’t Know the Half of It” a play about edge habitat?*

### **How we respond to transition and edge habitat**

Change for churches, for all of us, has never been easy or comfortable — just as it is not easy for Hazel or for Sarah. We want to belong. How is “You Don’t Know the Half of It” a play about belonging.

Finding our way through transition and living in edge habitat has a great deal to do with how we both welcome and find ourselves strangers.

*Who are the strangers in the play and what do they show us about transitions and living through them?*

### **Kenosis—self-emptying**

Kenosis is a Greek word for being poured out through self-emptying. Self-emptying makes it possible to be filled with something new, something beyond our control that is transformative personally and socially. We always need to voluntarily let go of what we possess so our empty hands can receive something new.

*What do characters in “You Don’t Know the Half of It” hold on to? Let go of? Receive new?*

### **Transformation and plot**

Transformation is changing from one thing into another.

*Where are the moments of transformation in “You Don’t Know the Half of It”, and how do they move the plot along?*

### **Doors and set design**

This play is about holding the door open for one another so that we can move from one place of the heart to another.

~Adele Finney, playwright

*How did the play’s set design support the aim and themes of the play?*

### **Addressing the Audience**

*Why do you think the playwright chose to cast the audience as “Mildred” who watches the unfolding events of St. Thomas Anglican Church?*

## **The Church**

Towards the end of the play, Sarah talks with Jocie Burns about the fact that Hazel has left the church, saying, “She’s turned away from the one place that could restore her soul.” Jocie provides Sarah with another view: “Love isn’t meant to get stopped up in a pew or a steeple... or an altar. Love is meant to flow through us, out to other people, outside these walls. You’re the love, Sarah... Hazel belongs in the heart of God, and yours is the closest door. Out there, not in here.”

*What has the church to offer a world inhabited by people like Sarah, who long for an authentic spiritual experience; for Hazel, who is comforted by tradition; for Will, who feels the world at the threshold of the church and aches to respond?*

## **A play about spirit**

Robert Winslow of 4th Line Theatre has said that “You Don’t Know the Half of It” is a play about spirit. Following are several reflections about “spirit” in the play.

Adele is a practising Christian, so she comes at these questions from a very different point of view than most of the artists you’ll be hearing from these days. Without trying to ram anything down anyone’s throat, she simply treats metaphysical phenomena and spiritual concerns as very natural, normal parts of life. This outlook – wherein the soul is a living thing that you can and should engage with – is representative of many, many of our fellow citizens: but it’s pretty rare to see it addressed in a positive light on the modern stage.

~ Leanna Brodie, dramaturge

I learned at a water conference for high school teachers, local water workers and activists that nearly everyone understood water as being connected to their spirit. So along with tears, rivers and streams are images for me of spirit moving within, between and throughout people, nature and the holy.

~ Adele Finney, playwright

One of the defining images in the play is a spring that opens at the threshold of the sanctuary and flows outward into the village. It is an image drawn from the book of Ezekiel—a flowing river, along its banks trees with leaves for the healing of the nations. Water is an important symbol in church life as it is used in baptism and as it is turned into wine at communion. The healing waters, flowing outward from the insular community that St. Thomas Anglican Church has been, are wounded by fire and by change but through these wounds become a source of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation.

~ Susan Spicer, director

## **The Other**

We always assume—most especially in a church—that transformation happens when people come to us and are changed by their association with us, by the Other changing to our ways or beliefs. It is nearly impossible to put into words the

complementary action of being called outside our personal and institutional selves to be transformed by the Other. I have been trying most of my writing life to find the words and stories for that process. In my experience the church has been both the greatest block and the greatest gateway into that transformation. It is astounding to me that we only have the beginnings of language for being transformed for the good by the Other.

~Adele Finney, playwright

*Who is Other in the play? How are they catalysts of transformation?*