

UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRICAL ARTS FOR STAGE AND SCREEN

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**STAGE**

IMAGINATION • CREATIVITY • INNOVATION

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# *Jumpers*

BASED ON AN ARTICLE BY

**TAD FRIEND**

DIRECTED BY

**CHRISTOPHER CLARK**

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# DRAMATURG: NOTE

Telling stories is such an integral part of being human. It is how we communicate with each other. Storytelling is how we connect with one another. Storytelling is how we learn from one another. It is how our forebears conveyed their lives' lessons to us, and how we convey our own life lessons to our posterity. Storytelling is a medium through which we can explore, understand, and empathize with emotions that may not even have written words to name. It has long been used as a way to convey principles and teach lessons. Storytelling shapes many different art forms: music, painting, book-writing, conversation, and, of course, theatre.

Why is Utah Valley University telling this story at this moment in time? What makes a dramatized production of an article about the Golden Gate Bridge relevant here and now?

Although this show is set in San Francisco, it explores a universal facet of humanity. Depression and anxiety are real forces that dominate the lives of so many, yet the topic is often considered taboo. Here in Utah Valley, there are so many societal stigmas to tiptoe around. We are told that everyone gets down and everyone feels hopeless sometimes, and we say that the trick is just to push through it. But the issue is too complex for such trivialization and simplification.

It is no small thing to feel completely helpless and alone, and in those dark moments, lives can be at stake. Through my involvement in this project, I hope to encourage open and honest conversation about a topic that we, as a society, seem to be so afraid of.

I invite you to learn to recognize the signs of depression and suicidal behaviors, both in the people around you and in yourself. Practice respectful empathy and set aside your own judgments of illnesses you may not personally understand. Know about the resources available to you that can save lives. And I thank you for joining us in this examination of humanity as we discuss a topic that is truly heartbreaking, perhaps even frightening, and requires so much vulnerability to be explored.

- Laura Dexter, Production Dramaturg

"I REALIZED  
EVERYTHING  
WAS TOTALLY  
FIXABLE...  
EXCEPT FOR  
HAVING JUST  
JUMPED"

- KEN BALDWIN, *Jumpers*

## JUMPERS: THE PROCESS

*Jumpers* is a unique piece of theatre, devised not from an existing script but adapted from an article in The New Yorker. Also entitled "Jumpers," the article was written by Tad Friend and published in the October 13, 2003 issue of the magazine. This means this is a "docu-play" – a staged documentary, or, in the words of the director, Dr. Christopher Clark, a "visual podcast."

On March 27, 2014, a follow-up article by Tad Friend was published, entitled "A Net, at Last, for the Golden Gate Bridge?" It was published as the bridge's board began moving forward with plans for a suicide barrier at the Golden Gate. Construction on the suicide prevention net began in April of 2017 with a projected completion date of January 12, 2021.

# SYMBOLS: IN THE COSTUMES

In conceptualizing the costumes for *Jumpers*, designer Courtney Park researched different religious and cultural beliefs and what they believe happens when a soul transitions from a body to an afterlife.

*"I picked an idea from each belief that was beautiful to me, and I found a symbol to represent it. To me, it doesn't matter what someone believes, because Death comes for us all. What matters is what brings the living peace after saying goodbye to those who have passed on. I chose bright, textured fabrics for the symbols because I believe a soul takes a spark of their life on Earth with them as they continue their journey into the afterlife."*

- Courtney Park



Image credit: Courtney Park

## QUESTIONS: FOR DISCUSSION

- What are the people, places, and things that help you when you find yourself in a low moment?
- Do you think this show is relevant today, here in Utah? How? Why?
- If you were to create a docu-drama, what story would you want to tell?

### SOURCES CONSULTED:

<http://www.alaskapublic.org/2016/11/02/guardian-of-the-golden-gate-bridge-speaks-in-anchorage-about-suicide-prevention/>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicides\\_at\\_the\\_Golden\\_Gate\\_Bridge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suicides_at_the_Golden_Gate_Bridge), <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=52321392>, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/golden-gate-suicide-barrier\\_us\\_58f155dbe4b0b9e9848c2afa](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/golden-gate-suicide-barrier_us_58f155dbe4b0b9e9848c2afa), <http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/03/02/golden-gate-bridge-suicide-barrier-completion-date-set/>, <http://www.mercurynews.com/2016/12/16/golden-gate-bridge-suicide-barrier-construction-to-start-in-2017/>, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/a-net-at-last-for-the-golden-gate-bridge>, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/10/13/jumpers>, [https://twitter.com/WayneFreedman/status/852574887805726720/photo/1?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref\\_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.huffingtonpost.com%2Fentry%2Fgolden-gate-suicide-barrier\\_us\\_58f155dbe4b0b9e9848c2afa](https://twitter.com/WayneFreedman/status/852574887805726720/photo/1?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw&ref_url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.huffingtonpost.com%2Fentry%2Fgolden-gate-suicide-barrier_us_58f155dbe4b0b9e9848c2afa), [https://www.uvu.edu/chss/suicide\\_prevention/](https://www.uvu.edu/chss/suicide_prevention/), <https://www.uvu.edu/studenthealth/psych/index.html>, <https://www.yahoo.com/news/blogs/lookout/years-later-cop-reunites-suicidal-man-saved-golden-171522199.html>



# SUICIDE PREVENTION

While *Jumpers* looks specifically at the stories surrounding the Golden Gate Bridge, the issues of depression and suicide are all around us. For those struggling, or who know others who are struggling, there are many resources available at UVU.

**The UVU CONFERENCE ON SUICIDE PREVENTION** on October 6 is a single-day event that will provide information on a wide range of issues dealing with the topic of suicide. It is designed to meet the needs and interests of students, professionals, families, service providers, and community members. The program will also include several concurrent sessions intended to help participants find hope, healing, and explore the complex aspects of suicide and prevention.

Visit [https://www.uvu.edu/chss/suicide\\_prevention/](https://www.uvu.edu/chss/suicide_prevention/) for more information.

## **COUNSELING RESOURCES AVAILABLE THROUGH UVU MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES:**

Room SC-221, 801-863-8876

Individual Therapy: \$10/session (Must be enrolled for at least 9 credit hours)

Couples Therapy: \$10/session (Must be enrolled for at least 9 credit hours)

Group Therapy: Free (Must be enrolled for at least 1 credit hour)

Please note: If you are in a suicidal crisis, emergency services are available to all UVU students. If you are in need of assistance for a crisis, please come into our office for walk-in hours available from 8 - 4:15pm Monday-Friday.

## **OTHER EMERGENCY CONTACTS**

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (24 hour service)
- Wasatch Mental Health: 801-373-7393 (24 hour service)
- Dial 9-1-1 and ask the police for assistance
- Take yourself to your local hospital emergency room
- Text "START" to 741741 to connect with a counselor at Crisis Text Line

### **CREDITS:**

Sharing Stage is published by the TYE Center for Theatre, Youth, and Education at UVU. This issue was guest edited by dramaturg Laura Dexter under the direction of Dr. John Newman, Director of the TYE Center, and Professor Janine Sobeck Knighton. Graphic Design by Jason Warren