

The Ghosts of Christmas Past

A Comedy in One Act

by Cheryl Ann Costa

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"Ghosts" debuted in the summer of 1997 with Silver Spring Stage in Maryland.

Author's note: This is not a Christmas story!

Synopsis: The Ghosts of Christmas Past 6M,2F

Prologue: It's Christmas morning 1969, recon squad Bravo has reached their rendezvous point and chow down on some "C" rations, while waiting for squad Alpha. While they eat they engage in some idle chatter about some rest and relaxation, and how their squad leader managed some weekend passes for them. Suddenly, without warning, they come under attack and all are lost except for PFC Frank Siciliano.

Body of the play: Early May, 1997, Silver Spring, Maryland, the home of Frank Siciliano, history teacher and devoted, though quirky, husband of Lucy. Franky is considered a bit of a lovable oddball by friends and work associates, known for always talking to himself about the strangest things. Frank's wife Lucy has always wanted Franky to see a counselor at the Veterans Administration about his "problem," and he has steadfastly refused. Unbeknownst to Lucy or anyone else, Franky is haunted by the ghosts of his recon squad from Vietnam, a group of ghosts who are just a bunch of dead boys who just want to have a little fun, while waiting for their destinies. Finally, after Lucy emotionally begs Franky to get help using the lever of a 25th wedding anniversary present to her, he finally agrees.

A VA home counselor, Ms. Smith, who had been quietly working with Lucy, comes by the house at the request of Lucy. Ms. Smith turns out to be an Asian. This not only upsets the ghosts but it upsets Frank, who while trying to put his best foot forward, makes an ass of himself trying to deal with the ever-present ghosts and their wisecracks. Ms. Smith leaves insulted and Lucy storms out of the house. Franky finds himself in the doghouse with Lucy. This angers Franky and he lashes out at the ghosts for screwing up his life. With that the ghosts retreat, and it comes up that perhaps "Franky" hadn't lived out his dreams. The ghosts decide to try and appear to Lucy to convince her that they're real.

When Ms. Smith returns to talk, she and Franky try to get to the bottom of his issues. He and his former army buddies made a pact that whoever made it back to the "World" alive would try and live out the dreams of the others. The issue, he revealed, was his dream, a dream that not even the ghosts knew about, nor could they hope to fulfill. Franky wants to know what happened to Minh Noy, his girlfriend and possibly the mother of his child. But that starts another conversation, a conversation that reveals something special about Ms. Smith, Her mother's name was Minh Noy. Within a few minutes it becomes evident that Ms. Smith is Frank's long-lost daughter.

This is a special event that completes the circle of events that releases the ghosts to move on with their destinies and releases Franky to settle down for the best years of his life with Lucy.

Epilogue: Four months later, Franky and Lucy are celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary with a quiet intimate dinner. During their celebration Lucy reveals that she is three months pregnant. Franky is overcome with emotion and shock.

Cast of Characters

Frank Siciliano: Older Frank 47

Lucy Siciliano: Frank's Wife 45

Robert 'Rob' Hawkins: Pvt USA 18 deceased

Jefferson Brown: Pvt USA 18 deceased

Jimmy Running Elk: PFC USA 19 deceased

Scott 'Goldy' Gold: Sgt USA 22 deceased

Frank 'Franky' Siciliano: PFC USA 19 (Younger Frank)

Susan Smith: VA Social Worker 27

Frank Siciliano: "Older Frank", 47ish, College History Teacher. An older yuppie, a bit of a couch potato, totally misunderstood by his wife of 25 years. He loves her very much, but is distracted by the presence of his ghostly war buddies and their need to live out their dreams.

Lucy Siciliano: Frank's Wife, 45ish, Science Teacher with a dedication to teaching young minds and to keeping a comfortable home. She's excited about her 25th wedding anniversary which is almost upon her. Her only wishes are that her husband can get some professional help with his "problem" and that they might have a child.

Robert 'Robbie' Hawkins: Pvt US Army, 18 (deceased) Bostonian, wanted to be a stock broker like his dad after the war.

Jefferson Brown: Pvt US Army, 18 (deceased) Street kid from Chicago, wanted to go to college to learn air conditioning after the war.

James 'Jimmy' Running Elk: PFC US Army, 19 (deceased) Eastern band Cherokee from Tennessee Reservation, wanted to go to medical school and become a pediatrician and return to the reservation.

Scott 'Goldie' Gold: Sgt US Army, 22 (deceased) Good kid from Elmira, NY, has been taking college extension courses in business administration, planned to graduate in February and get out of the service in April, to help run his uncle's construction business.

Frank Siciliano: PFC US Army, 19 (Younger Frank)
Good Italian from Baltimore, MD wants to go to college to study electrical engineering after the war.

Susan Nguyen Smith: 27 Veterans Administration Social Worker, was born in Cam Ranh Bay, Republic of South Vietnam. Came to the United States in 1975 with her mother, as the USA was pulling out. They were relocated to Galveston, Texas. She considers Galveston, Texas her hometown.

Places:

Prologue: Someplace north of Dhang Nang, Republic of Vietnam, 25 December 1969

Scenes: A quiet living room in Silver Spring, MD, Spring 1997

Epilogue: A quiet living room in Silver Spring, MD, Fall 1997

Set Requirements:

Prologue: The Vietnam scene would be best performed in front of a curtain. The GI's simply wander out to center stage lit in a night time tableau, with gobo specialty lighting to suggest tropical foliage. The dialog starts at the point the GI reaches center stage and tells the others to stand down and have some chow. The key to this set is the illusion suggested by the lighting. The battle sequence would best be simulated by weapons that have been equipped with gelled strobes. A pair of modified gobo instruments with strobe lamps would further suggest the environment by giving off reflections of foliage.

Primary Scenes: The Living Room is comfortable with a couch, a recliner, end tables, carpets, table lamps, television.

The Dinner: Can simply be the coffee table set for two, place setting, ice bucket and champagne bottle etc.

Costumes:

The GI's : Camouflage jungle fatigues and combat boots, combat helmets in the prologue, and optional " boony rain hat" in the body of the play.

Older Frank: Adult Male Contemporary, though a bit preppy and conservative. He is a stuffy eccentric college professor in his late forties.

Lucy: A nineties sort of casual woman.

Ms. Smith: A nineties woman with conservative taste, remember she's a therapist.

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Prologue

[A group of five Vietnam era soldiers walk into the theater with classic dressing; jungle fatigues helmets and replica M-16's, They get to their stage area (either simulated jungle or physical structure)]

Gold: OK, this looks like the spot. Everybody chow down 'til alpha catches up with us. Robbie you've got watch, Franky you relieve him when you're done eating.

[all except Rob pull out something to eat, Rob wanders out]

Elk: So Goldie, did you talk to the old man about the R&R?

[He takes a bite of Spam off his knife, everybody looks at Goldberg]

Gold: As a matter of fact I did.

Brown: So you gonna tell us or what? *[eating]*

Siciliano: Come on Goldie did you get the 24-hour passes or what?

[he takes another bite]

Gold: Nope!

[the rest of the GI's start to moan, Goldie begins a big grin]

I got us a 96 hour pass and R&R orders to Cam Ranh Bay.

[Everybody starts to cheer, Goldie motions to keep it down]

Elk: How the hell did you pull that off?

Brown: I'd like to hear that myself.

Gold: Annnh, let's just say it was a Jewish thing. I told the old man that a couple of you are becoming Jews and want to see the Rabbi. Of course the nearest one is in Cam Ranh Bay.

Elk: Just who did you say is converting? Not me, I hope.

Gold: Nah!!! Franky and Jefferson. *[takes a chomp]*

Brown: You what? What the fuck am I supposed to tell my mom?

Siciliano: Easy!! Jefferson, we can go along with that for some R&R passes, but what about Robbie and running Elk? What about them?

Gold: Oh, They're going too. You see, I told him that you guys needed them for moral support.

Franky: Moral support for talking to a Rabbi? *[quizzical]*

Gold: Nope, moral support in case you have to have circumcsions!

Brown: A circum -- what !!!!!?

[Interrupted by Hawkins who comes running back in holding his helmet]

Franky: Circumcsions!!!! I'm not going to get any damn...

Hawkins: CHARLIE'S COMING!!!!

[Battle scene choreographed with "Dies Irae" from Mozart's Requiem which typically runs approximately 1:40. The replica M-16's should be mounted with gelled strobe units to simulate real gun fire, additional gelled strobe units should be in the overhead. One by one each of the GI's drop during the run of the music. Key Word: INTENSE!]

Franky is the first to be hit about 30 sec into the music. His hit needs to be done in such a way that his right hand comes off his rifle and lifts his helmet off to show stage blood all over his head and then stage fall. The last GI to drop will be Running Elk who will see all the others down and charge out as a screaming warrior, only to be riddled with bullets and drop a few feet away. The pantomime motion will be key to this scene.

During the scene change, the dead bodies will be removed by stage crew in black dragging the bodies off. Taps will play. The dead GIs must not spoil the moment by getting up during the scene change.]

Scene One

Music: adult contemporary

Lights: General

[A living room in suburban Silver Spring, Maryland.]

[Lucy enters the stage carrying what appear to be grocery shopping bags. She crosses the stage to exit to apparently the kitchen. Adult Frank enters carrying bags as well and crosses the stage. Lucy re-enters from the kitchen side and meets him halfway, stops in front of him and via facial expression begs for a kiss as he still holds the bags.]

Franky: This is the last of it hon.

Lucy: Great!

[begs for kiss -- he gives her a kiss]

Franky: Would you like some help putting this all away?

[he gives her another kiss]

[grabbing the bags gently from his hands]

Lucy: I love you very much my sweet, but you know that you never get things put away just the way I like so, no!

[giving her another peck - Lucy turns and starts to walk away with the bags]

Franky: I guess I'll read the paper!

Lucy: You do that! It's on the couch.

[she exits, Franky sits down and picks up the paper and does a quick glance at the front page]

Franky: Hey honey, did you hear they cloned a sheep in Scotland?

Lucy: *[off stage]* Yah, I saw it on CNN. It's really slick how they did it, I'll tell you all about it over dinner.

Franky: It's so nice to have a science teacher in the family! *[Amused]*

Jefferson's Voice: What in hell's a clone?

[Franky unshaken, still reading]

Franky: It's an animal that's been copied from another animal!

Gold's Voice: How the heck do they do that?

Franky: I'm not exactly sure but I'm sure Lucy will tell us all this evening over supper.

[Coming up from behind the couch]

Gold: I'm not going to sit through another science lecture. I'll sit in here and watch Star Trek with Jefferson and Robbie.

Franky: But you hate Star Trek.

[he comes around and sits on the couch, looks over Frank's shoulder to read the paper]

Gold: I hate your wife's science lectures over dinner worse.

[Jefferson comes up leaning over the back of the couch]

Jefferson: Hey Franky, it's almost time for Star Trek. Why don't you turn on the TV?

Franky: You do it! I'm reading the paper.

Jefferson: Oh come on bud, you know it's hard for us to do that.

Franky: I'm busy reading the paper. You do it, you need the exercise.

Jefferson: Oh all right, but I better not miss the beginning.

[Jefferson, begins trying to press the button, but nothing happens]

[Robbie and Running Elk enter the room from the kitchen]

Elk: Hi Franky!

[Frank just nods his head]

Robbie: God, Franky your wife is the most manic person I've ever seen. Cans here, baking goods here, pasta there. You'd think she worked for the supply master.

[Robbie tries to help Jefferson, together they manage to get the remote control to turn on the TV.]

Franky: She's just well-organized.

Elk: Franky, she goes way beyond organized.

[Lucy - enters briskly]

Lucy: Do you want steamed rice or a baked potato?

[she walks over and turns off the TV, much to the ghosts' dismay]

Franky: A baked potato would be nice.

[responding to the ghosts' bitching]

Honey, why'd you turn off the tube?

Lucy: Why waste power? Besides you hate Star Trek!

[She returns to the kitchen – Frank's amused]

Franky: You've got to love her!

Jefferson: Come on Franky, it's about to start. *[almost pleading]* Come on bud *[beat]* please.

[Franky grabs the remote control turns on the TV]

Franky: OK, you said the magic word.

[End of Scene - Fade to black]

Scene Two

[As the light come up, Lucy is sitting in a lotus position facing Frank on the couch eating a Three Musketeers bar and telling Frank all about the cloned lamb. Ghost Goldberg is sitting in the middle of the couch and the other ghosts are sitting or stretched out on the floor.]

[as lights come up]

Lucy: -- and so by using a tiny spark of electricity they fake the genetic material of the original sheep and the donated sheep egg into joining, the spark and the joining trigger the DNA to start building a new sheep but it's a copy of the original!

Gold: Now I know that this is hell, I'm condemned to a lifetime of science class.

Franky: Honey, you always have such a way of making the most complicated thing sound simple.

[Lucy just smiles and nods as she continues to lick her cone.] 3 Musketeer Bar?

Elk: Hey Franky, how about doing the manly thing and dominate the TV. Let's watch a movie.

Franky: I'd rather not watch television, I'd rather just sit here and talk to my honey.

Lucy: Ohhhh, That's sweet --

Elk: Oh, God, hit the dirt, incoming mush!

Lucy: -- You know hon, I've been wanting to talk to you about something.

Robbie: "I'm ovulating, let's make a baby!" *[in his mock Lucy style]*

Lucy: I'm ovulating, let's make a baby!

Franky: Why did I know you were going to say that?

Lucy: Am I that predictable?

Franky: No, not at all!

Gold: Baloney!

Lucy: Actually, I wanted to talk to you about that and something else.

[struggling for a moment]

Our anniversary is coming up in a few months.

Franky: I know, I know, did you think I'd forget? I mean, after all, it is our twenty-fifth. Who could forget something like that --

Lucy: I knew you'd never forget, there's something else.

[struggles for a moment then takes a breath]

Honey, I want you to see a shrink!

[The ghosts bust out laughing]

Franky: *[to the ghosts]* Stop laughing!

[catching himself] Didn't mean you, hon.

Lucy: Sweetie I'm not laughing, I'm very serious. This is just my point. Ever since I met you you've made these strange little side comments to someone or someone's who aren't there --

Jefferson: I'm here, what the hell is she talking about?

Lucy: -- Honey, I don't know how to say this but you've always been --

Franky: -- a bit eccentric?

Lucy: I think "a bit" is understating it. Ever since we dated I noticed these quiet little conversations that you have when you think you're alone.

Robbie: She's been spying on you Franky.

Frank: I take it you're bothered by my conversations. Would you like it if I just stopped talking to them?

Lucy: "Them???" Who is "them"?

Elk: Frank, what the hell are you doing?

Franky: Yes, them!

Gold: Franky, don't do this, she'll think you're nuts!

Franky: Lucy, you know I love you very much, and I'd never do anything to hurt you.

Lucy: I know sweetheart! What are you getting at?

Jefferson: Don't do it, Franky, she'll never understand.

Franky: A long time ago when I was in the army --

[Lucy interjects]

Lucy: You mean when you were in Vietnam? You've never talked about that.

Gold: Franky, I don't if now's a great time to bring this up.

Franky: Well, I was part of a recon squad, Recon Squad Bravo. There were five of us: Pvt. Robert Hawkins, Pvt. Jefferson Brown, PFC Jimmy Running Elk, Sgt. Scott Gold, and me PFC Frank Siciliano.

Elk: God, that's the first time I've heard my name that formal since my funeral.

Franky: We were as tight a bunch of young GI's as you could find. Sgt. Goldberg, "Goldie" kept us out of trouble for the most part, *[beat]* things weren't so bad.

Lucy: Honey, are you OK? Are you sure you want to talk about this?

Robbie: Yah, Franky are you sure you want to talk about this.

Franky: Like all the other kids that were over there, we all had our dreams of what our lives would be like after the war. We were always telling each other what we were going to do when we got back to the "World."

Lucy: The "World"?

Franky: Back to the states. One day we all made a little *[searches for the words]* survival pact.

[Franky gets a bit distant]

Lucy: A survival pact? What's that?

Elk: Oh God, here it comes!

Franky: Each of us promised, that whoever got back to the states alive, would live out the dreams of the others in the squad, the ones who didn't make it. You have to remember, we were like brothers.

Jefferson: We still are!

Elk: You got that right.

Lucy: So what happened? Did some of your friends die? *[Franky withdraws]*

Robbie: I don't think he should be talking about this.

Gold: Wait, this might be good for him. Maybe if he gets it out of his system maybe we can all move on.

Lucy: Honey, tell me what happened to your friends.

Franky: We were on recon patrol on Christmas morning. We stopped to have some chow and to rendezvous with Squad Alpha. Goldie had just told us we were going to get a four day pass to an R&R site down country.

Lucy: R&R, what's that mean?

Franky: Rest and Relaxation. Anyway Charlie showed up and we had brief but intense firefight, I was wounded and everybody else was killed. My tour was almost up so I was shipped home to recuperate. I even got to attend the funerals of all the guys. That's when it happened.

Lucy: What happened?

Franky: I was at Gold's funeral, and they had just finished the full military honors when I saw him --

Lucy: Saw who?

Franky: Scott Gold in his jungle fatigues sitting on my '68 Mustang.

Lucy: Sweetheart, you missed him so bad you wanted to see him.

Franky: No sweetheart, it was him in his ghostly form and it seemed like he didn't have any place to go, so he came along with me. I drove to Jefferson's hometown for his funeral and there he was sitting in a tree watching his funeral.

[Lucy just stares at him, not knowing what to think]

Jefferson: You know Franky, I'd be sitting there yet, if you hadn't come along.

Franky: Lucy, one by one I picked up all my buddies and they've been with me ever since.

Lucy: You mean you think they're sitting here now? You mean they've been around all these years?

Franky: Something like that.

[Lucy suddenly gets wide-eyed]

Lucy: OH MY GOD, Franky, did they ever sit in our bedroom when we were, *[struggles]* you know?

[she gestures a sexual movement -- the ghosts start rolling on the floor laughing]

Franky: NO! Absolutely not, I made them promise not to.

Elk: Yeah, he made us swear on our own graves.

Lucy: Honey, this has been very overwhelming for both of us. I wish you had told me about this years ago, I would have been very understanding. *[she wraps her arms around him]* Sweetheart, under the circumstances, I must now insist that you speak with someone at the Veterans Administration about this.

Franky: The VA?

Lucy: I think they're the best-equipped to deal with this sort of thing, don't you?

Franky: OK, my love, anything for you. You call the VA, and I'll see whoever they send.

Gold: What are they going to send, an exorcist?

[End of Scene - Fade to Black]

Scene Three

Time: A few days later

[As the scene opens, the three GI's are sitting on the couch and one is laying on the floor looking at the ceiling.]

Elk: Well, that VA person is going to be here soon.

Gold: She'll probably be dressed like a librarian and have ugly legs.

Jefferson: I'm not worried about her as much as what she'll do to Franky.

Robbie: Me to, she'll most likely try and convince Franky we don't exist.

Gold: Perhaps we don't!

Elk: Of course we exist, we're talking to each other, aren't we? Besides, Lucy even is starting to believe in us a little too.

Gold: Well, if you listen to some philosophers, they might tell you that we exist because Franky believes in us.

Jefferson: You don't say?

Gold: Yep, and if what they say is true, the moment Franky stops believing in us --

Elk: We'll be gone just like that. Like we never existed!

Robbie: Guys, I think it's time that we put ourselves into battle posture.

Jefferson: Say what?

Gold: What do you have in mind Robbie?

Robbie: Look, we have to keep Franky believing in us. That means we must get rid of this VA lady, whoever she is.

Elk: You got a plan, Robbie?

Robbie: I just might have. Let's go up in the attic and discuss it.

[The ghosts wander out of the living room. Lucy enters the room, she does a once-over on the living room, plumping pillows etc.]

[sort of hollering]

Lucy: Honey, are you dressed yet?

[Franky enters]

Franky: Why you hollering?

Lucy: I thought I heard the shower. Maybe I'm hearing things.

Franky: So when is the VA lady going to get here?

Lucy: I'm going into the kitchen to make some coffee. You hang out and relax. *[she exits]*

[The GI's re-enter from the other side]

Gold: OK, Franky, we think we've got this thing figured out.

Franky: Got what figured out?

Elk: The way we figure it, as long as you don't let this VA lady talk you out of believing in us you'll have no problems. *[doorbell]* Ah nuts she's here.

[Franky walks offstage to the front door area]

Gold: OK guys this is it.

[Lucy re-enters -- Franky enters the room with an attractive Asian lady]

Franky: Lucy, this is Ms. Smith from the VA.

Lucy: Pleased to meet you.

Smith: Thank you for inviting me.

Robbie: They sent a damn slope!

[over his shoulder]

Franky: Shut up!

[looking to back to Ms. Smith]

Please have some coffee.

Smith: Thank you!

[They sit on the couch]

Gold: Franky, do not trust her, she's the enemy!

Franky: No, she's not the enemy.

Smith: Mr. Siciliano, is my presence causing you some difficulty?

Lucy: Yes Frank, what's gotten into you?

Franky: Some old issues about Ms. Smith's nationality are coming up.

Smith: Does Asian ancestry upset you?

Robbie: You bet it does.

Franky: Not exactly, but it's causing some ripples in the room.

Smith: Maybe we should speak in private.

Franky: I can speak freely in front of Lucy. You see Ms. Smith --

Smith: Susan! My name is Susan, please call me that.

Franky: OK Susan, this going to sound nuts --

Smith: No it's not, just say it!

Franky: A long time ago, I made a pact with a bunch of army buddies. They were all killed except for me and ever since then they've haunted me, *[beat]* in a nice sort of way *[beat]* if you know what I mean.

Smith: That's not all that uncommon, Frank --

Elk: She's patronizing you, Franky.

Smith: I've dealt with this sort of thing before. Were you a single survivor from a battle situation?

Franky: As a matter of fact I was.

Smith: Do they seem very real to you like you could reach out and touch them?

Franky: Absolutely.

Smith: Frank, the mind is a very powerful mechanism. Sometimes we create things and imaginary people when we feel overcome with what we perceive as failures and being alone.

Elk: Goldie, she called us imaginary!

Smith: One of the first things you have to do is accept that these ghosts you perceive are not real and they can have no affect on us in the world of reality.

Gold: That does it!

[with one finger dumps smiths coffee on her]

Smith: Eeek! Oh no, my coffee!

Franky: Goldie, what the hell was that about?

[as Jefferson pulls Lucy's hair]

Lucy: Oooouch!

Franky: Jefferson, stop pulling her hair.

Smith: I don't understand how that could have happened. There's a logical explanation.

Elk: Try this for logic.

[he sits on Smith's lap – suddenly she can't move]

Smith: What the hell?

Franky: Stop that, Running Elk!

Robbie: How about a kiss, Lucy?

[he pulls Lucy's head back on the couch and kisses her forehead]

Lucy: Eeeek! Ahhhhh! *[runs out of the room]*

Franky: Lucy, what's wrong? Damn you Robbie, why did you do that?

Smith: Mrs. Siciliano, there's a explanation for this.

Gold: Explain this sweetheart!

[he steps on her toe]

Smith: Owwww! Mr. Siciliano, you stepped on my toe.

Franky: No I didn't, I'm way over here.

Smith: Never in my life have I seen such a case of mass manipulation than I just saw with you, Mr. Siciliano. I'm out of here! *[she exits]*

[Franky stands there lost for a few moments -- the ghosts are pleased with themselves]

Gold: I think we showed her who's imaginary. *[yeahs all around]*

Robbie: Absolutely Goldie, we sure had them both going. *[all laugh]*

Elk: Did ya see that "zip" yell when Robbie stepped on her foot? *[all laugh]*

Jefferson: I wonder how Miss Science Teacher is going to explain this. *[all laugh]*

[Lucy stomps through the living room with a packed bag]

Franky: Honey, where are you going with that bag?

Lucy: Don't honey me you, you ____! I don't know how you pulled it off nor why you messed up this session, *[beat]* but you managed to scare the ____ out of that poor woman and myself, and worse -- you _____ me off Frank. All I wanted was the best for you, and you pull this stupid stunt.

Franky: But... but... but --

[Lucy talking over him]

Lucy: I'm going to my sister Barbara's. *[she stomps out]*

Franky: -- but I didn't do it!

[Sound: SLAM -- Franky puts his hands over his face]

[the ghosts happy with themselves plop themselves on the couch in delight -- laughing]

Franky: DAMN YOU GUYS! *[Franky gets their attention]* Damn you, I've never asked anything of any of you. I only did the things that none of you could do anymore, and you did this to me.

Gold: Franky we were only --

[Franky cuts him off]

Franky: SHUT UP! Don't Franky me. Look you guys, I have a life and I'm trying to live it! Goldie, remember when I wanted to go to college for engineering, you insisted that I

go to Elmira College and study teaching so I could work for your uncle in the construction business, like you wanted to do.

Jefferson: But we --

[Frank cuts him off]

Franky: -- and you Jefferson, you wanted to study air conditioning, so I took that damn home study course just so you could have the experience of helping fix an air conditioner. Do you know how much that course cost me, not to mention that garage full of tools that I never use?

Robbie: Franky, you're upset, come on and calm down.

Franky: Oh, now it's time for Mr. Stock Broker *[beat]*, do you know just how much I hate stocks and bonds? Did I ever tell you how much I hated working for your dad while working on my masters degree? You wanted to be a stock broker, not me!

Robbie: But... but --

Franky: But nothing, I almost went to jail because of your dad's involvement with insider trading.

Elk: That wasn't Robbie's fault.

Franky: Running Elk, it might as well have been. I wouldn't have been there if not for him.

Elk: Did my aspiration ever cause you any trouble?

[calming down]

Franky: No it didn't, actually I rather enjoyed setting up that reservation medical scholarship, not to mention raising money for it. On the other hand, it did take a lot of time away from my young wife. Time when we could have had a child. Now she's nearly in menopause and it's a crapshoot at best if we'll ever have a child of our own. *[long pause -- almost in tears]* I love you guys a lot, but did you ever stop to think that while I was out living your dreams, I didn't live any of my own.? *[long pause]* Get the hell out of here for a while. *[beat]* Leave me alone.

[The ghosts leave hanging their heads - Franky is left alone on the stage for a very pregnant silence. He tries to turn on the TV with the remote. It doesn't work. He is alone, symbolic that his life is now empty]

[End of Scene - Fade to Black]

Scene Four

[As the lights come up the ghosts are standing and sitting around talking about what they should do next]

Jefferson: Guys, it's not fair that Franky hasn't lived any of his dreams.

Robbie: We need to find a way to make it up to him.

Elk: Like what?

Robbie: Maybe we can get him into MIT for a second degree program.

Gold: Oh sure, we're going to walk in to Franky and tell him he needs to apply for a sabbatical and run off to engineering school.

Elk: What's a sabbatical?

Jefferson: Don't you guys from Tennessee know anything? It's a sort of a working vacation.

Gold: Nah, he won't do it. Besides he's up for the chair of the History department, he'd never leave now.

Robbie: Guys, there's a bigger question here.

Gold: Like what?

Robbie: What happens to us if Franky realizes his dreams? Do we just vaporize or what?

Gold: I guess we'll move on to our destinies.

Robbie: But what if we just become nothing, then what?

Elk: It might be our big chance to get away from it all.

Robbie: I'm dead serious here. *[the ghosts give him "the" stare, realizing what he said]*
Sorry guys.

Elk: Back on the reservation, my grandfather taught me that we all move on to a time of rest and then we recycle. I think the term is reincarnate. Life just renews itself, we're all going to get to live again.

Jefferson: My Baptist grandma said we all go to heaven, especially if we died in the service of our country, it's in the bible. You have to have faith.

Gold: I guess that's the question, do we all have faith?

Robbie: Look, Franky deserves our help. He put himself out there for all of us.

Gold: You're right, service "above and beyond the call of duty." Franky's done his part, now it 's time for us to do our part.

Robbie: But what can we do? We're just a bunch of dead guys.

Gold: I've been thinking about that. Did any of you guys notice that neither of the two women even entertained the notion of our existence when we started disturbing things? They kept blaming everything on Franky.

Elk: So, what are you getting at?

Gold: You know, when Jefferson tries hard enough, he can turn on the TV using the remote control.

Jefferson: Yeah, but you have to work at it.

Gold: I think we should try and convince Lucy we're real.

Robbie: Why?

[Gold gives him the look]

Robbie: OK, look. Even if we manage to do that, all we'll do is scare the stuffing out of her.

Gold: The way I see it, she's a smart lady, a scientific mind and all that, she'll understand. Trust me on this.

Elk: Well, there's no time like the present. Here she comes.

[Lucy enters from the outside entrance carrying her bag, she sits down on the couch with a magazine]

Gold: I'll try it first.

[he moves around behind her on the couch and begins concentrating and speaking to her -- says "Lucy" kind of like Ricky Ricardo]

Gold: Luuuuucy, Lucy can you hear me? *[Lucy doesn't budge]* Lucy, this is Sgt. Gold calling you from the great beyond.

[For a moment she sits up like she heard something, glances around momentarily, then back to her magazine]

Elk: Grandfather once told me that the living beings and spirits respond to music.

[Robbie moving behind her]

Robbie: I've got just the thing *[begins to sing]* Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true. I'm half crazy all for the love of you. *[Lucy looks up]* It won't be a stylish marriage. I can't afford a carriage, but you'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two. *[rubbing her ears]*

Gold: Impressive, *[beat]* Here let me try it with you.

[Goldberg and Robbie begin to sing]

Gold and Robbie: Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true. I'm half crazy all for the love of you. *[Lucy begins to look around]* It won't be a stylish marriage. I can't afford a carriage, but you'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two.

[Lucy rubbing her ears, shaking her head]

Elk: Gee, that managed to get a rise out of her.

Jefferson: I think we just need a little more horsepower, if you know what I mean.

[Jefferson and Elk move to behind the couch with Gold and Robbie, and perform the next in barbershop style]

Jefferson, Robbie, Elk, Gold: Lucy, Lucy, give me your answer true. *[Lucy sits up straight, wide eyed]* Frank's half crazy all for the love of you. *[Lucy looks to one side then the other]* It won't be a stylish marriage. He can't afford a carriage, *[Lucy stares straight ahead]* but you'll look sweet upon the seat of a bicycle built for two.

[She slowly turns around on the couch and sees the GI's]

Lucy: Wh... Who are you? *[looking at Jefferson]*

[Gently and politely saluting]

Jefferson: I'm Private Jefferson Brown, at your service, ma'am.

Lucy: O h M y G O D *[beat]* You're Frank's ghosts! AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

Gold: Please Lucy, don't be scared of us, we won't hurt you.

Elk: We've been with you and husband for years, and we think you're a pretty terrific lady!

Lucy: Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh! *[Franky comes running in the room, embraces her]*

Franky: Honey, what's wrong!

[pointing at the ghosts]

Lucy: Ga ga goo ghos ghosts -- THEM!!!

Franky: Them???? Honey, what did they do?

Lucy: They were singing barbershop music.

[doubletake as something dawns on Franky]

Franky: Honey, *[beat]* can you see them?

[the ghosts are all smiles and pleased with themselves]

Lucy: Yes, I can see them. They're standing there grinning at me.

[the ghosts are still grinning and nodding]

Frank: Honey, that means they're real. You see, I'm not nuts!

Lucy: Honey, you mean that these guys are really your dead buddies? You mean that they're really gho... ghosts ? *[beat]* Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Frank: Sweetheart it's OK, it's OK. They won't hurt you, obviously something remarkable has happened. I think all of us need to sit down and talk about this.

[End of Scene - Fade to Black]

Scene Five

[As the lights come up Franky is chatting with Ms. Smith and obviously into a serious conversation -- the ghosts are quietly sitting on the couch, one on the arm]

Smith: So, after you came back to the States, you began trying to live out your friends' dreams?

Franky: Not exactly like that, it wasn't that deliberate, but it did affect how I attended college and graduate school. I went to college in the town where Goldie's uncle had a construction company.

Smith: And what about grad school?

Franky: Boston! That's where Robbie Hawkins' dad had a brokerage firm. When all the insider trading scandal broke out in the late eighties, Robbie's dad's firm was implicated. Since I wasn't actually a licensed broker, I was cleared of any wrongdoing.

Smith: What about the other two? Jimmy Running Elk and Jefferson Brown?

Franky: Running Elk was an Eastern Band Cherokee raised on a Tennessee reservation. He wanted to go to medical school after the service and go back and be a pediatrician. So since it wasn't practical for me to become a doctor, I set up a foundation and held fundraisers to build up a big enough endowment to give significant scholarship for reservation kids who wanted to study medicine.

Smith: That was a major achievement in itself. What about Brown?

Franky: He wanted to study air conditioning and refrigeration, so I took one of those home study courses. I've got a garage full of tools and equipment to prove it. Lucy thinks I should auction it all off.

Smith: I know a voc-tech school that could use that kind of equipment if you would care to donate it.

Franky: You know that's a splendid idea. I'll certainly consider it.

Smith: Throughout all of this, you selflessly gave of your time, talents and energy to keep the memory of your war buddies alive.

Elk: You bet he did, lady! *[the other ghosts shush him]*

Smith: Frank, answer me this. What did you do to live out your dreams and your aspirations?

[He reflects for a moment]

Franky: Nothing!

Smith: If there was anything you could realize as one of your dreams, what would it be?

Franky: That's a tough one. I have different dreams from different aspects of my life. There were my dreams from before I met Lucy and my dreams since I met Lucy. For Lucy and me, well, we'd like to have a child of our own.

Smith: And from your Vietnam days?

Franky: My girlfriend. *[beat]* I had a girl friend in Dhang Nang. I heard after I got hurt that she had been made pregnant by me and she had a child. I wanted to go back and find them and bring them to the states. Then things went sour over there in '75 and the U.S. pulled out. In the post-war confusion, I lost track of them. I always wanted to find out what she had and I've always wondered what happened to her.

Elk: I never heard him speak of her.

Robbie: Me neither. *[the rest shake their heads]*

Smith: Where did you meet her? Was she one of the working girls?

Franky: No, actually she was a bank officer at the Bank of America at the Post.

Smith: How'd you meet her? What was her name?

Franky: I spoke moderately good French from high school, and I heard her speaking French in the bank. Sometime later, I asked her out on a date, and she accepted. We became very good friends. She was really quite a delicate flower, and she had a real wit to her. Her name was Minh Noy.

Smith: Minh Noy? That's my mother's name, but that's a very common name in Vietnam.

Franky: I know what you're thinking. I doubt very much if it was your mother. Do you know what the odds are.... Nah! *[He reflects a moment]* How did your family come to the United States?

[offstage a brilliant light begins to fade up]

Smith: My mom told me that after she got pregnant she moved back to her home in Can Ranh Bay, she went to work for the bank branch there at the airbase. She said that when things started to get ugly, the bank made arrangements for her and me to leave the country. When she got to the states, she applied for asylum. The government relocated her near Galveston, Texas. Mom married a nice Texas farmer and that's where I grew up until I went to college.

[Franky is lost for words]

Elk: Hey Goldie, what's that?

[pointing offstage at the brightness]

Gold: Jefferson, it's your turn for recon, go check it out, *[sensing resistance]* Go!

Franky: When were you born Susan?

Smith: June 23rd, 1970

Franky: *[stunned]* Good God, I think you are my daughter!

Smith: *[overwhelmed]* You mean, you might be my biological father? *[beat]* I agree with you, good GOD, what if it's true? Can I use your phone, I've got to call my mom.

Franky: By all means.

[he picks it up and places it in front of Smith - with an obvious breath]

We might as well be sure about this.

[Susan begins dialing]

Gold: Where the hell is Jefferson? Hawkins check it out.

[Hawkins walks out to see where Jefferson is]

Smith: Hello, Tommy? Hi, it's me. *[pause]* I'm fine. *[pause]* No, there's nothing wrong. I need to speak to Mom, OK? *[looking to Franky]* My brother Tommy, he sensed something in my voice.

Franky: Brothers are like that.

Gold: Elk, check out Robbie and Jefferson *[Elk runs out to the edge of the light]*

Smith: Mom, I need to ask you a couple of questions. No, nothing's wrong but I need to clear up something. Remember, you told me that my dad was a GI in Vietnam? *[pause]* What was his name? *[pause]* PFC. Frank Siciliano. *[she takes a really big breath like she's hyperventilating]* Why?? *[giggle]* Mom he's sitting right here in front of me. *[pause]* Yes, he is. Do you want to speak to him? *[offering the phone - Franky pauses, lost for words]*

[Elk standing at the edge of stage looking at the light]

Elk: Goldie, come here you've got to see this. *[Goldie preoccupied with Franky]* Goldie, come here, you've got to see this. *[Goldie preoccupied with Franky, grudgingly gets up and moves over to Elk]*

Franky: Bon Jour Minh Noy! *[pause]* Yes! *[pause]* It's so wonderful to hear your voice. *[Franky carries on small talk in a more hushed tone]*

[Goldberg - Looking at Franky]

Gold: Jimmy, to think we almost blew it by chasing away his war baby daughter.

Elk: Yeh, I guess this is it. Shouldn't we get along and find Jefferson and Robbie?

[Gold nods and Elk walks into the light offstage]

[Gold looking over at Franky, pitching a sharp salute]

Gold: Good Bye Franky and thanks for everything!

[Gold walks off into the light]

[Music cue]

[End of Scene - Fade to Black]

Epilogue

[A pair of pillow chairs have been set up on each end of the coffee table in front of the couch. On the table, an oriental dinner and ice bucket - as the lights come up we see Lucy and Frank celebrating their anniversary]

Franky: Sweetheart, Happy Anniversary. *[he hands her a small jewelry case]*

Lucy: Thank you honey. *[she opens the case to find a diamond brooch]* Honey, it's lovely but how can you afford it?

Franky: Oh, I saved my lunch money and I had some help.

Lucy: Had some help? You didn't borrow money, did you?

Franky: No, no, nothing like that. I simply covered it with a small bonus I got at work.

Lucy: What kind of bonus? *[still looking over the jewels]*

Franky: Oh, just the bonus they give new department chairs!

Lucy: YOU! You're the new History chairman!!!! Eeek! *[covers her mouth remembering she's in a restaurant – whispering]* You're the new department chair! That's fabulous!

Franky: I'm rather pleased myself. Lets have some champagne.

[he pulls out the open bottle and starts to pour]

Lucy: Honey, please don't pour any for me. *[sheepishly]*

Franky: No champagne on our anniversary? Sweetheart, you aren't sick, are you?

Lucy: No, I'm not sick *[beat]* but I am pregnant! *[she searches his expression]*

Franky: You're what? Did you say pregnant? *[she nods]* We're going to have a baby? That's wonderful, that's absolutely terrific. I'm going to be a father!

Lucy: Honey, there's something else, *[pause]* it's not just one baby.

Franky: Twins!! Is it twins?

Lucy: Sweetheart, with all that fertility medicine and all, *[pause]* weeeell, it's QUADS.

[momentarily stunned]

Franky: I'm going to be a father to quadruplets. *[pause]* OH MY GOD!

Lucy: What's wrong, hon?

Franky: IT CAN'T BE THEM!

[Music cue]

[Black Out]

THE END

The Ghosts of Christmas Past

This play was my attempt to do a show based on the “Topper” theme; of an ordinary Joe, haunted by a couple of wise-cracking ghosts. In this case, the theme concept was “Topper” meets “Platoon.”

The story in essence was about a half dozen ghostly GI guys from the lead character’s past. These ghosts have been hanging with him for a really long time, and like Topper, everybody thinks the lead is eccentric as hell. Especially when he talks to seemingly thin air. But the kicker in the original draft story concept was not the metaphysical nature of the story but the dynamics of the lead married couple.

In my original drafts, Lucy was Louis, and the lead couple was supposed to be a gay couple. My intention was to tell a story of some ghosts who had made a vow or pact with the lead while they were alive in Vietnam. In this case, the ghosts couldn’t move on to their destinies because Frank, the lead, hasn’t dealt with his unfinished business. The conflict was when the spouse finds out a little tidbit from Frank’s deep past relationship with a Vietnamese woman named Minh Noy. The angst model worked equally well for the wife, as it would have for Frank’s male significant other.

Alas I was unable to find a gay theater in the DC area that would perform the work at the time (1997). They were all hung up on doing only full-length works vs. perhaps an evening of one-acts. In addition it seems that the cold reality of commercially successful Gay Theater, requires that producers put plenty of naked boys on stage; something that is known in the trade, as a penis parade. While artistically I was willing to consider the concept of the dead soldiers being presented on stage in their birthday suits to represent the primordial aspect of their souls. The reality of it the idea was just to plain to lewd for me as a director/playwright, especially considering that I was about to become a novice Buddhist nun.

In addition, Silver Spring Stage wasn’t ready to do an openly gay play at the time either, so I quickly adapted the play to use a wife vs. the other husband. All the dynamics worked fine except the end. In the original play, the gay couple workout their differences and sponsor a young lady to be their surrogate mother and as karma would have it, the ghosts find a new home reincarnating as quadruplets. In the produced version, Franky and Louise celebrate their anniversary, and she announces that she is pregnant with a spotlight on her belly, in the sound system we can heard the soldier ghost characters bitching and complaining in her tummy.

I would really like to see it performed as a gay play someday. This play was intended as a campy comedy but the debut cast and director decided that it was a angst filled drama with tension relieving humor and played it that way with great reviews. Who am I to argue success, I’m only the playwright.