

BACKSTORY

YOUR GUIDE TO TIMELINE PRODUCTIONS



WASTELAND

WORLD PREMIERE

BY SUSAN FELDER

directed by William Brown

YESTERDAY'S STORIES.
TODAY'S TOPICS.

Timeline
Theatre Company

a message



Dear Friends,

Sometimes it helps to be just a little bit lucky.

This notion obviously isn't new to me—I am continually aware of my great fortune to have been around the right people at the right time to start TimeLine in 1997, and how that unlikely connection altered countless things.

Timing—and perhaps more important, being open to what pops up around you—can be everything.

How *Wasteland* ended up on our stage involved its own bit of fortuitous timing—and a willingness to adapt.

Playwright Susan Felder sent me the script last winter. That delivery was followed by an impassioned referral from my long-time friend, collaborator and TimeLine Associate Artist William Brown, director of such TimeLine shows as *To Master the Art* and *Not About Nightingales*. “You need to hear this play out loud. It will knock you out,” he said.

As luck would have it, a last-minute change for the February edition of our TimePieces play reading series allowed us to slot in *Wasteland* swiftly, with Bill directing it.

I have known, liked and admired Susan for many years (mostly as an actor and director), and I wanted to be very clear to temper her expectations, noting that our season planning for 2012-13 was pretty much fully set. “I don’t want you to get your hopes up that the reading is a tryout to get your play into next season,” I told her. “Plus, the other shows we’re lining up are all things that we’ve been cultivating and planning for two to four years. Things almost never just pop in this quickly.”

And then we did the reading.

It was a rather informal, only modestly rehearsed, yet totally magical night, led by actors Nate Burger and Steve Haggard. Bill’s prediction turned out to

be totally spot on. This play did indeed knock us out. It seemed to knock the entire room out. The packed house was on the edge of its seat, holding its collective breath. As soon as it was over I turned to a fellow Company Member and said, “I can’t ever remember that much tension in this theatre, over 13 years of producing in this space.”

Then and there, our best-laid plans were thrown up in the air.

Late into that night the TimeLine Company Members huddled upstairs in our rehearsal room. Our initial plan had been to finally, formally sign off on what we thought was the full slate of four plays for our 16th season.

But this damned *Wasteland* had crashed the party with an urgency to have a full production. Soon.

A couple of hours later, after much shifting and re-drafting of the season line-up, we had crafted

**No matter what obstacles divide them,
no matter what literal or ideological barrier
exists between them, somehow, some way,
a connection must be forged.**

plans to produce *Wasteland* now, in the midst of a hyper-polarized election cycle.

What struck us that night about Susan’s haunting and powerful play is that, while it’s set in the heat of the Vietnam War, it has as much to say about today as it does about that infamously fractured and politicized era. And that despite its backdrop of seemingly bleak human disconnect, *Wasteland* is at

its core a play about hope. And connection.

Thrown together but in separate cells, two soldiers are faced with the realization that they’re all they’ve got. No matter what obstacles divide them, no matter what literal or ideological barrier exists between them, somehow, some way, a connection must be forged.

The first step should be simple—listening. But most of us seem to get tripped up trying to take that first step, particularly when the person on the opposite side is, in some way, other than ourselves. Why listen when dismissal feels oh so much better?

Besides, listening goes against everything we’re fed in today’s social/ political arena, where the tendency is just to get louder with your own point of view.

I readily admit that I too have room for improvement. But I am

incredibly grateful that last winter TimeLine had the wherewithal to listen to Susan and Bill’s pitch and to adjust on the fly. We made something seemingly impossible possible—rethinking a pretty solid initial plan.

Susan’s gift of *Wasteland* is a stirring, stunning achievement, especially for a first-time playwright. We’re delighted to share her play with you this season amid a collection of three other plays that all take TimeLine to places, eras and cultures that have previously been foreign to us.

We’re glad to have you with us in 2012-13 for this season-long journey.

Wasteland gives me a great deal of hope, about so many things. Perhaps most of all, I hope it will get all of us talking. And listening.

All the best,

Nate Burger in a publicity shot for Wasteland. Nate performed in the February reading that led to Wasteland being chosen for TimeLine’s 2012-13 season.



the glossary

AK-47 — Basic infantry weapon of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and the Viet Cong guerrillas (VC). Originally manufactured in the Soviet Union.



An AK-47 rifle.

Arty — Artillery

Boo Coo — Modification of the French “beaucoup,” meaning “many.”

Boom boom — A short visit with a prostitute.

Bouncing Betty — Type of booby-trap in which an explosive is propelled about four feet into the air and then detonates, causing a greater likelihood of death or injury.

Charlie, Charles, and Chuck — Slang for the Viet Cong, from a shortening of the military alphabetic phrase “Victor Charlie.”

C-rations — The canned meals used in military operations. C-rations also included an allowance of toilet paper, salt, pepper, sugar, cigarettes, and

sometimes Chiclets or chewing tobacco.

Evac — Abbreviation of “evacuation,” generally of wounded soldiers by helicopter.

Extraction — Removal of troops from an area by helicopter.

Fire-base — A temporary military encampment.

Firecracker — An artillery round composed of many small bomblets, which are ejected over a target area and explode in the air simultaneously. The

name comes from the rapid popping sound they make.

FUBAR — Acronym for “Fucked Up Beyond All Repair” or “Recognition.” Soldiers used the term to describe impossible situations or equipment.

Hootch — House or living quarters, or a native hut.

Interval — Distance between soldiers moving in a column or line. If soldiers were close together there were more casualties if a bomb or grenade exploded.

Klick — One kilometer (0.62 miles).

LZ — Acronym for “landing zone.”

LZ cut — A maneuver performed from C-130 aircraft, usually by rolling a large bomb out the rear to clear an area so the aircraft could land.

M14, M16 — Both standard issue rifles for the U.S. military in Vietnam; the M16 model replaced the M14. M16 rifles were notorious

for failing in the jungle conditions of Vietnam.

Mad minute — Military exercise in which all soldiers fired non-stop toward the enemy, or a fixed point, for one minute.

Mortar — Tripod-based system for firing shells at a high angle. A round is dropped in the tube, striking a firing pin, causing the projectile to leave the tube at a high angle.

Punji stick — A stake or spike in the ground, often at the bottom of a camouflaged pit.

Recon — Abbreviation of “reconnaissance.” A mission to obtain information about the activities and resources of the enemy.

SAR — Acronym for “search and rescue.”

Sky pilot — Slang for a chaplain.

Spider hole — A camouflaged enemy foxhole.

Trip-wire — A thin wire strung across an area in which a soldier might walk. Tripping the wire would generally activate a mine or other booby trap.

Triple canopy — Thickest jungle, with dense vegetation growing at three levels, often up to 50 feet thick.

TIMELINE: The Vietnam War and Surrounding Historical Events

1950s

- **August 1950** The United States commits advisors to France in the latter’s war against the Vietnamese and agrees to pay for half of the French war effort.
- **1954** The United States funds about three quarters of the war’s cost.
- **October 1955** Ngo Dinh Diem defeats Bao Dai in a rigged election and proclaims himself President of the Republic of Vietnam.

1961

- **1961** Four hundred North Vietnamese guerrillas attack a village in Kienhoa Province. They are defeated by South Vietnamese troops.
- **April 17, 1961** A U.S. plan to invade Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro goes wrong when air support at the Bay of Pigs does not arrive.
- **May 12, 1961** On a tour of Asia, Vice President Lyndon Johnson visits Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon and assures Diem that he is crucial to U.S. objectives in Vietnam.

- **October 12, 1961** President John F. Kennedy authorizes the creation of the “Green Berets,” a Special Forces operation based at Fort Bragg, N.C. They will specialize in counterinsurgency.

1962

- **1962** The U.S. Air Force begins using Agent Orange, a herbicide that comes in orange containers and is used

Special Events and Resources

the conversation

TimeLine looks forward to engaging our audience in conversations inspired by our productions. We hope you will participate in the array of additional resources and online communities available:

SUNDAY SCHOLARS

Sunday, Nov. 18 is Sunday Scholars, a one-hour post-show panel discussion featuring experts talking about the play’s themes and issues. **Admission is free.** Visit timelinetheatre.com for panelists and more.

COMPANY MEMBER DISCUSSION

Our Company Members shape the artistic vision and choose programming for TimeLine. On **Sunday, Nov. 4**, join them for a free post-show discussion.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSIONS

On **Wednesdays, Oct. 24, Nov. 7 and 14, and Dec. 5; Sundays Oct. 28 and Dec. 2 and 9; and Thursdays Nov. 1, 8 and 29**, moderated by a TimeLine Company member and featuring cast and production staff.

STUDY GUIDE

A **study guide** is available at timelinetheatre.com.

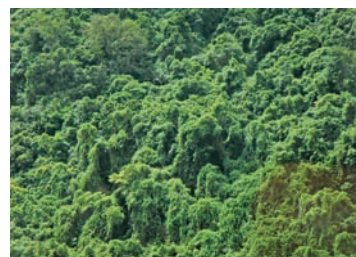
BLOG AND MORE!

Find behind-the-scenes insight and conversation on our blog, **Behind the ‘Line**, via timelinetheatre.com.



For the latest, “like” us on Facebook (**TimeLine Theatre**), follow us on Twitter (**@timelinetheatre**) and visit our YouTube channel (**youtube.com/timelinetheatre**).

Dense “triple canopy” jungle.



the captives

the war



The facade of the Hoa Lo prison museum, formerly known as the "Hanoi Hilton" during the Vietnam War, in Hanoi, Vietnam.

During the Vietnamese conflict, hundreds of Americans were incarcerated in Vietnamese prisons in North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and China. Many were confined in barbaric conditions. 591 prisoners of war were released during Operation Homecoming in the spring of 1973, but more than 2,000 Americans remained (and still remain) unaccounted for. While the "Hanoi Hilton" is the most well-known prisoner of war camp, there were at least 13 other large camps and soldiers could be held in smaller villages as well. Because of the large number of soldiers who remained missing,

"The camera can describe in excruciating detail what war is all about ... It's true that on its own every piece of war film takes on a certain anti-war character simply because it does not glamorize or romanticize. In battle, men do not die with a clean shot through the heart; they are blown to pieces."

— Journalist Morley Safer, writing about the Vietnam War in 1966

POW/MIA advocacy groups were formed that criticized government efforts to investigate and recover possible prisoners of war. Some of these groups continue to work to see if soldiers remain in Vietnam, or to locate burial sites or evidence of death. New intelligence reports and evidence coming out of Russia after the fall of the U.S.S.R. have kept hope alive for families who are still seeking resolution to the questions surrounding missing soldiers. But a complete accounting of soldiers listed as missing or presumed dead remains unlikely.

Torture

The 1949 Geneva Convention guidelines call for the humane treatment of prisoners of war. These guidelines, however, were ignored by both North Vietnamese and South Vietnamese forces. The Viet Cong were accused of torturing captives in a variety of ways including beating them with fists, clubs, and rifle butts,

flaying them with rubber whips, and stretching their joints with rope in an effort to uncover information about American military operations. Poor food and medical care was standard. Prisoners were often kept in isolation and in some prison camps used a system of tapping to communicate with other prisoners.

Former prisoner of war Mike McGrath described his experience in the "American Experience" documentary *Return with Honor*:

Some men were tied to their beds, sometimes for weeks at a time ... the usual position was with the wrists handcuffed behind the back. A man would live this way day and night, without sleep or rest. He could not lie down because his weight would cinch the already tightened cuffs even tighter, nor could he turn sideways.

The cuffs were taken off twice a day for meals. If the cuffs had been too tight, the fingers would be swollen and of little use in picking up a spoon or a cup. Hopefully, a man could perform his bodily functions while the cuffs were momentarily removed at mealtimes. If not, he lived in his own mess.

The Vietnam War was a watershed moment in American history. It was the first war widely covered by film crews, who brought images of the war into American homes in an unprecedented way. Advances in radio technology meant that generals could order troops from a great distance, rather than being close by.

Unlike World War II, during which Americans felt a moral imperative to enter the war and also achieved a definitive victory, the conflict in Vietnam was more complicated in its aims and outcomes. This complexity undermined how many Americans felt about the war and about the role of the United States on the international stage.

The U.S. Army's use of the chemical Agent Orange to defoliate jungles, its use of napalm, and the killing of civilians in the My Lai massacre turned many Americans against the war and fostered outrage at the U.S. military. Nick Ut's 1972 Pulitzer Prize-winning photo—showing children running down a road in pain after a napalm bomb was dropped on their village by the South Vietnam Air Force—epitomized the civilian cost of

the war and reinforced the criticism that no moral authority could easily be claimed by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces.

While political and social dialogue in the United States has often fractured, the Vietnam War was particularly divisive, splitting American families as well as public opinion.



366 blue plastic capsules contained the birthdays chosen in the first Vietnam draft lottery drawing in 1969.

Enlisted vs. Drafted Soldiers

One of the major political issues of the Vietnam War was the military draft. An individual who enlisted was making a decision to join the military. But many soldiers who served in Vietnam did not enlist, instead they were drafted into the military through the Selective Service and a government-created lottery system. Men aged 18 to 26 were eligible for the draft. Approximately 1.8 million were drafted; accurate numbers are hard to determine because some who knew they were going to be drafted enlisted instead.

to defoliate dense jungle, to expose roads and trails used by Viet Cong forces.

- **February 27, 1962** Diem's palace in Saigon is bombed in an attempted coup.
- **October 1962** The Cuban Missile Crisis occurs. Photos taken from a U.S. spy plane reveal that the Soviets are placing offensive missiles on Cuban soil. President Kennedy orders a naval blockade around Cuba to prevent the delivery of additional missiles; the world comes the closest it's ever been to nuclear war.

After visiting Saigon, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield voices his concerns that Diem has wasted the \$2 billion America has spent there.

1963

- **January 3, 1963** Viet Cong fighters defeat the South Vietnamese Army in the Battle of Ap Bac.
- **1963** Tensions between Buddhists and the Diem government are strained as Diem, a Catholic, replaces Buddhists in several key government positions with Catholics. Buddhist monks protest the religious discrimination by setting themselves on fire in public places.
- **November 2, 1963** Diem is overthrown in a CIA-backed coup led by General Duong Van Minh. He and his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, are killed.
- **December 1963** Two dozen American soldiers and civilians are prisoners of war in Vietnam and Laos.
- **November 22, 1963** President Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Tex.

Kennedy's death places the burden of Vietnam on the new president, Lyndon B. Johnson.

1964

- **January 30, 1964** In a bloodless coup, General Nguyen Khanh seizes power in Saigon. The South Vietnamese junta leader, Major General Duong Van Minh, is placed under house arrest.
- **August 2, 1964** Three North Vietnamese PT boats allegedly fire torpedoes at the U.S.S. Maddox, a destroyer located in the international waters of the Tonkin Gulf, approximately 30 miles off the coast of North Vietnam.
- **August 7, 1964** Congress passes the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, authorizing President Johnson to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The resolution allows Johnson to wage war without securing a formal declaration of war from Congress.
- **November 1, 1964** The Viet Cong attack Bien Hoa Air Base, near Saigon.
- **November 3, 1964** Lyndon Johnson is elected president in a landslide over Republican Barry Goldwater. The conflict in Vietnam is a significant issue during the election.

1965

- **February 1965** Operation Rolling Thunder, sustained American bombing raids of North Vietnam, begins. The air raids will continue for three years.
- **March 8, 1965** The first American combat troops, the 9th Marine Expeditionary

"To me, the tragedy of the Vietnam war was not that there were disagreements—that was inevitable, given the complexity of the [conflict]—but that the faith of Americans in each other became destroyed in the process ... I believe that most of what went wrong in Vietnam we did to ourselves. I would have preferred another outcome—at least another outcome that was not so intimately related to the way that we tore ourselves apart." — Henry Kissinger, addressing a State Department Conference on September 29, 2010

Brigade, arrive in Vietnam to defend the U.S. airfield at Danang. U.S. troop levels will reach 200,000 by the end of the year.

1966

- **February 6-9, 1966** President Lyndon Johnson meets with South Vietnamese premier Nguyen Cao Ky in Honolulu, Hawaii. Johnson promises to aid South Vietnam, with the caveat that the U.S. will monitor South Vietnam's efforts to expand democracy.
- **April 12, 1966** In an effort to disrupt supply routes along the Mugia Pass, American B-52s bomb North Vietnam for the first time.

1967

- **1967** Numerous protests—including a protest by veterans of World Wars I and II and of the Korean War—take place in cities across the U.S.
- **January 8, 1967** In Operation Cedar Falls, about 16,000 U.S. and 14,000 South Vietnamese troops set out to destroy Viet Cong operations and supply sites near Saigon. They discover a massive system of tunnels, apparently a former Viet Cong headquarters.
- **May 1, 1967** Ellsworth Bunker replaces Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr. as U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam.
- **April 4, 1967** The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks out against the Vietnam War.
- **April 8, 1967** Students at the University of Wisconsin demand that recruiters for Dow Chemical not be allowed on campus because they produce napalm used by the U.S. military.

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara testifies before a Senate subcommittee that U.S. bombing raids against North Vietnam have not achieved their objectives.

1968

- **1968** Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia allows U.S. and South Vietnamese forces to pursue the Viet Cong into his country.
- **January 1968** The North Vietnamese launch the Tet Offensive. Catching the U.S. military off guard, they seize several key cities, including Saigon. American forces turn back the onslaught and recapture most areas, but the Communists consider the offensive a "psychological victory."
- **1968** The battle for Hue rages for 26 days as U.S. and South Vietnamese forces try to recapture the city seized by the Communists during the Tet Offensive. Much of Hue is leveled in the fighting, leaving civilians homeless. After U.S. and Army of the Republic of Vietnam forces retake the city, they discover mass graves of those executed during the Communist occupation.

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General William Westmoreland requests 206,000 additional troops.

- **March 16, 1968** The angry and frustrated men of Charlie Company, 11th Brigade, America I Division, enter the village of My Lai and in a chaotic day kill numerous civilians, including women and children. When news of the atrocities at My Lai surfaces, it will send shockwaves through the U.S. political establishment, the military's chain of command, and an already divided American public.
- **March 31, 1968** Lyndon Johnson announces he will not run for reelection.
- **April 4, 1968** Martin Luther King, Jr. is slain in Memphis.
- **May 10, 1968** Peace talks begin in Paris between W. Averell Harriman representing the United States and former Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy heading the North Vietnamese delegation.
- **June 6, 1968** Robert Kennedy is assassinated in Los Angeles.
- **August 22-24, 1968** Mayor Richard J. Daley orders police to crack down on anti-war protests at the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Violence erupts between



Anti-war protesters gather in Chicago's Grant Park in 1968.

police and protestors as the nation watches on television.

- **November 5, 1968** Richard M. Nixon is elected president with 43.4% of the popular vote. 1969

- **January 20, 1969** Nixon is inaugurated as the 37th President.

- **1969** Nixon authorizes Operation Breakfast, a secret bombing campaign in Cambodia with a goal to destroy Communist supply routes and camps.

- **May 12, 1969** The first of 17 "national security" wiretaps on White House aides and media is installed following newspaper leaks about the secret bombing of Cambodia.

Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird announces a policy of "Vietnamization," in which the role of the U.S. military in Vietnam will be diminished and the military burden to defeat the Communists will shift to the South Vietnamese Army.

Richard M. Nixon is inaugurated as President of the United States in 1969.



- **September 2, 1969** President Ho Chi Minh of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam dies of a heart attack at age 79.
- **October 15, 1969** One of the largest anti-war demonstrations assembles in Washington DC.
- **November 12, 1969** Journalist Seymour Hersh reports on the My Lai Massacre and Americans learn for the first time of atrocities committed by American troops. At the time of public reports, the Army has already charged Lieutenant William Calley with the crime of murder.

1970

- **February 21, 1970** U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese General Le Duc Tho begin secret talks aimed at brokering a cease-fire.
- **March 18, 1970** Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia is ousted in a coup orchestrated by his defense minister, Lon Nol.
- **May 4, 1970** National Guardsmen open fire on a crowd of student anti-war protesters at Ohio's Kent State University, resulting in the death of four students and the wounding of eight others.

1971

- **March 30, 1971** Lt. Calley is convicted of murder for the events that occurred at My Lai. Of the 26 officers and soldiers initially charged for their part in the My Lai Massacre or in the subsequent cover-up, only Calley is convicted.
- **June 13, 1971** The New York Times publishes the Pentagon Papers, revealing a legacy of deception concerning U.S.

policy in Vietnam on the part of the military and the executive branch.

- **July 15, 1971** President Nixon announces his plan to visit the People's Republic of China. His announcement is seen by the North Vietnamese as an effort to create discord between them and their Chinese allies.

- **October 1971** President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam is re-elected without opposition, amid charges of corruption.

1972

- **1972** Nixon cuts troop levels in Vietnam by 70,000.

- **January 27, 1972** In a televised appearance, Nixon reveals Kissinger and Le Duc Tho's secret peace talks.

- **February 1972** Nixon travels to China for talks with Communist Party Chairman Mao Zedong.

The Nixon administration orders the heavy bombing of supply dumps and petroleum storage sites in and around Hanoi and Haiphong in an effort to influence ongoing peace talks.

- **June 17, 1972** Five men are arrested for breaking into the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate building.

- **November 7, 1972** President Nixon wins reelection with 60.8% of the popular vote.

- **January 1973** All five Watergate burglars enter guilty pleas.

- **January 27, 1973** A cease-fire agreement is signed in Paris by Henry Kissinger and



Signing of the Vietnam peace agreement in Paris, 1973.

Le Duc Tho. In a speech on January 23, President Nixon has said it will bring "peace with honor in Vietnam and Southeast Asia."

The United States announces the end of the military draft.

- **March 29, 1973** The last American troops leave Vietnam.
- **May 17, 1973** The Senate Watergate Committee begins televised hearings.
- **July 16, 1973** The Senate Armed Services Committee opens hearings on the secret U.S. bombing of Cambodia; Congress orders that all bombing in Cambodia cease as of midnight, August 14, 1973.
- **1973** The Nobel Peace Prize is awarded to Henry Kissinger of the United States and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam. Kissinger accepts the award; Tho declines, saying that peace does not yet exist in Vietnam.

1974

- **January 4, 1974** Alleging violations of the cease-fire, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu announces resumption of war with the North Vietnamese.

A report issued by the National Academy of Sciences states that the use of chemical herbicides during the war has caused long-term damage to the ecology of Vietnam.

- **May 9, 1974** The House Judiciary Committee opens impeachment hearings against President Nixon.

- **August 9, 1974** President Nixon resigns.

- **January 6, 1975** Communist forces capture Phuoc Long province. The U.S. does not respond to the loss of the South Vietnamese Army.

- **March 24, 1975** The North Vietnamese initiate the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, an effort to take the city of Saigon.

- **March 26, 1975** The city of Hue in South Vietnam falls to the North Vietnamese.

- **April 16, 1975** The Cambodian capital Phnom Penh is captured by Khmer Rouge insurgents. The Lon Nol government surrenders, ending a five-year period of fighting and ushering in a period of genocide under the dictator Pol Pot.

- **April 23, 1975** In a speech at Tulane University, President Gerald Ford announces that the Vietnam War "is finished as far as America is concerned."



Historic photograph of the fall of Saigon in 1975.

- **April 29, 1975** Americans and their allies evacuate by helicopter as Saigon falls to the Communists. The last two U.S. servicemen to die in Vietnam are killed when their helicopter crashes.

Playwright Susan Felder

the interview

During rehearsals for *Wasteland*, TimeLine Artistic Director PJ Powers (PJP) talked with Chicago playwright Susan Felder (SF) about her life as an actor, director and now playwright; the experience of working on her first fully produced play; and getting caught in that hole in the ground.

(PJP) You've primarily been an actor and director, so what led you to playwrighting?

(SF) The need to express something that you don't feel is being expressed anywhere else, I guess.

The journey from actor to director to playwright seems natural to me. As an actor you're focused on one character—telling their story. As a director, the story gets bigger. It was pretty natural to go the extra step and ask, can I shed light on the entire story I know in my head? Can I capture the essence of something that I feel is hidden and needs to be said?

(PJP) What's it been like to be in the writer's chair?

(SF) VERY different. When I became a director, it made me understand how to work better as an actor—more able to collaborate from a knowledgeable place.

Writing is similar. I get how your head can spin as an actor—how a director has to use nails to get things into place sometimes. It's my desire not just to write a script, but to make it accessible for

a director and actors. I think the big difference is that as a writer, you're not the captain. You're not the crew. You have to build the whole boat so others can get you where you want to go.

But I feel bad making these actors go to these places sometimes. They love it, but after six hours they come out shell-shocked. I feel like I'm the artillery.

And then I go home and do re-writes—and have to get back to that place again—stay in that hole. Most therapists would say "don't dwell." As a writer, you have to, in order to remember, to feel the truth of what that actually is.

(PJP) You've worked with these *Wasteland* guys before—director William Brown and actors Nate Burger and Steve Haggard. Why were they each right for this project?

(SF) Nate took my acting classes at Loyola University Chicago and did the first reading of this play in my office when it was a 25-page short play. I found his access to emotional life amazing.

I think Steve is one of the boldest, bravest actors I know. And he's a party. I needed a Riley who was funny but could project an entire personality through a solid wall.

And Bill and I have known each other for years. He's been one of my most consistent friends. My champion. My critic. He was instrumental in getting this seen, because he saw that the play was about the triumph of the human spirit.

Having all of these guys in the room when you're exploring the most intimate parts of human experience is a gift. They're the guys you want in your foxhole.

"In my darkest hours I always felt, 'At least I'm not in a hole somewhere where nobody can find me.'"



Susan Felder

(PJP) What inspired you to write *Wasteland*?

(SF) OK. I'll keep this short. Sometimes things spin until they burn and you have to get them out quick. On a literal basis, in my darkest hours I always felt, "At least I'm not in a hole somewhere where nobody can find me." Eventually, I decided to explore that awful fear. I began writing *Wasteland* one morning and didn't get off the couch until it was finished. I felt safer. Like it

wasn't loose in the air or the dungeon anymore, but like I had pulled it up and looked it in the face.

(PJP) What role did research play in the script's development and evolution?

(SF) Research was huge. At first I was just relieved the piece had been written. Then I needed to know if my truth was clear. For that you need other people.

So I got two students to read it in my office. This is where the title came from. After I asked them what they felt it was about, one asked, "What is this for you?" It was my wasteland—my exploration of and journey through.

I sent it to another friend who said it was "bogus." He said they wouldn't talk like that in Vietnam. So, oops.

I had used that setting because I needed a world that nobody could understand—that seemed like hell. The hole is just another circle of that hell. I now needed to do my research. So I talked to vets. I read books and watched interviews, movies, documentaries, etc. I lived in it for months.

I think the folks at TimeLine understand that history is just a record of who we

are, and how we become that and why things keep resonating with us. When I chose Vietnam, I didn't know a lot about it, but something resonated with me. As I researched it, I found what that was. One source talked about Vietnam and how it changed the country. We woke up and said, "This is who I am?! How did I get here? This can't be it." It was like America's mid-life crisis or something. That resonated with me.

(PJP) Like so many, you have family ties to the Vietnam War. What did the personal connection mean to you in writing this?

(SF) Vietnam was, in my limited understanding at 10 years old, a monster that had passed. But two experiences stayed with me and influenced my choices.

We had a family friend when I was a teenager. He looked like Jesus Christ, but he rode a motorcycle and smoked—a gentle man with a lot of demons. My parents took him under their wing. I knew he had been to Vietnam but we never, never talked about it. He was looking for a place to hold on and he found our family. But, it didn't last.

I did engage my brother-in-law about Vietnam. He told me to read *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien and that *Platoon* got the conditions right. He then began to talk about his time in "the Nam." My sister watched in careful astonishment. He didn't usually talk about the war much, but if someone was telling a story about it, he wanted them to "get some of it right at least." He still, at 63, has a plastic baggie of red dirt that he carried home.

(PJP) Your play opens just a few weeks before the election. What do you hope *Wasteland* has to say about America in 2012?

(SF) Coming from a political family (my Dad was in politics for 30 years), I am numbed by the division in this country. The wall seems impenetrable and I want to know why, so that it gets exposed. Differences are part of it. Our similarities bond us, but they've become a trap. Keeping others out leaves us with a smaller space. Walls go both ways.

My father was the end of a type of politician that can't exist anymore. These guys golfed together, talked together, had lunch. They had different ideologies, but they supported the country

and knew it was all a means to an end. It was more of a team sport. If somebody had a better idea, they'd say "Shit, that's a better idea. Let's go with that." Strangely, it let them think for themselves.

So, I'm a little broken-hearted over what's happened to our country, our sense of unity. We battle each other. We're in a civil war of a different kind. Much like Vietnam at home during that time. It's hard to say how we got here. I think concentrating on the divisions, the walls, is what did it, sure. There's also something in the general psyche of the country that is repeating the post-Vietnam phenomenon: Loss of hope over things too complicated to grasp; the feeling that nobody, not even Uncle Sam, has our backs.

(PJP) I've talked about the magical night when we did a reading of this play and quickly shuffled plans to get *Wasteland* on our schedule. What was the reading like for you and why is TimeLine a good home for your play?

(SF) That night—wow. I'll try to share what that was like because I'll always be grateful for that night whatever else happens with this play.

I held my breath through the reading. The end came, the lights went up and I felt the entire audience, at the same time, exhale. There was a moment of exhale, stillness—and then they applauded, for a long time. So I thought, "Was that—something? Okay, that was cool." Then they started to talk—not about how to change the play, but rather, how the play affected them.

The only criticism was the one I absolutely wanted. Someone asked if maybe we could see Riley on one side of the stage—imagine what a cool play that would be. I know I've won when they say that—they want him that badly. Like Joe does. And they can taste it and imagine.

I knew TimeLine was the right place, because I think the mission here—to explore present day resonances from yesterday's echoes, to see where human beings are timeless—goes to the heart of the play. There's an energy at this theatre that I've always longed for. In a play about longing, well, it was a good match for a lot of personal reasons.

Read an extended interview online at TimeLine's blog *Behind the 'Line*, available via timelinetheatre.com.

backstage

TimeLine's Board of Directors is critical to the success of the organization, and we are pleased to recognize the incredible support and leadership of Board Treasurer Kathy Feucht.

Kathy first came to TimeLine in the spring of 2008 to see a performance of the remount of TimeLine's acclaimed production of *Fiorello!*. Following the performance, "I was looking for board opportunities in Chicago," recalls Kathy, and "I was convinced this was an organization that I wanted to become more involved with." Kathy joined TimeLine's Board that June.

Since then she hasn't looked back. "In many ways TimeLine is the same as when I started,"



TimeLine Board Member and Treasurer Kathy Feucht.

notes Kathy. "However, the growth of both the organization and brand has been tremendous. The organization has grown substantially, has received numerous accolades, and its productions have received attention nationally and globally." In fact, since Kathy joined TimeLine's Board, subscriptions have increased by 159% and

the organization's overall budget has grown by 111%.

In the next 15 years Kathy expects TimeLine will continue to grow and will "likely have a new home and continue to be viewed as one of Chicago's premiere theatres. All of this accomplished while still making audiences feel an intimate part of our shows and family." When this happens Kathy believes "TimeLine will still be a theatre that creates productions that evoke conversation at the end of a show. And I'm sure TimeLine productions will still compel me to Google search historical events and facts at the end of a performance!" admits the self-proclaimed history geek.

Kathy is a partner at Deloitte & Touche LLP, where she has worked for

the last decade. In addition to serving on TimeLine's Board, Kathy also serves on the City Year Board in Milwaukee, which is a national organization whose volunteers support schools throughout the country that need assistance in improving attendance, basic academic skills and graduation rates.

While City Year and TimeLine serve different constituencies in different ways, they share a common goal of providing enhanced educational opportunities and experiences. "One of the things that I admire about TimeLine is its commitment to improving Chicago Public School students' education by bringing high-quality

arts education to the schools," remarks Kathy about TimeLine's Living History Education Program, "extending (and expanding on) the theatrical and learning experiences adult audiences have at TimeLine to students."

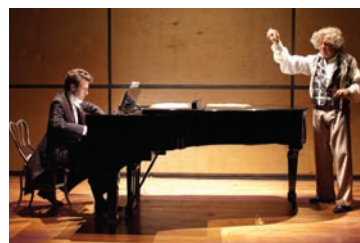
Ultimately, Kathy says that she feels "TimeLine is an exciting and growing organization, and I enjoy being part of an organization that continues to artistically challenge itself while growing at an accelerated pace while remaining fiscally responsible." And we couldn't be happier that she has chosen to play such a vital role in making TimeLine's growth and success possible.

SAVE THE DATE!

Step Into Time is Friday, March 15, 2013

TimeLine Theatre Company invites you to Step Into Time with us on Friday, March 15, 2013, in the beautiful and historic Grand Ballroom at the InterContinental Chicago. We hope you will join us for an entertaining evening as we step into another era in honor of our mission to raise funds in support of TimeLine's work. Guests will enjoy appetizers and libations in the spirit of the evening's theme, as well as a gourmet dinner and entertainment created exclusively for this event.

More information will be announced shortly. Questions? Contact Development Manager Lydia Swift at 773.281.8463 x26 or lydia@timelinetheatre.com.



Between Fiorello! in 2008 (left)—when she first joined TimeLine's Board of Directors—and 33 Variations in 2012 (above), Kathy Feucht has helped oversee TimeLine's finances during a time that saw the company's annual budget more than double.

BACKSTORY: THE CREDITS

Dramaturgy @ Historical Research by Maren Robinson

Written by Maren Robinson, PJ Powers, Lydia Swift and Lara Goetsch

Edited by Kerri Hunt and Lara Goetsch

Photography by Lara Goetsch

Graphic Design by Lara Goetsch

Wasteland Photo Illustration by Ryan Robinson

Backstory is published four times each season.

Pictured on back cover (from left): Playwright Susan Felder; dramaturg Maren Robinson; actor Nate Burger; stage manager Jinni Pike; sound designer Andrew Hansen and costume designer Rachel Anne Healy; and director William Brown.

Our Mission:

TimeLine Theatre presents stories **inspired by history** that connect with today's social and political issues.

Our collaborative artistic team produces provocative theatre and educational programs that engage, entertain and enlighten.

the production



October 12 - December 30, 2012

by **SUSAN FELDER**
 directed by
WILLIAM BROWN, SDC
WORLD PREMIERE

TimeLine's latest world premiere follows extraordinary successes with new works like *My Kind of Town*, *To Master the Art* and *Hannah and Martin*.

An American soldier, captured by the enemy in Vietnam and isolated in an underground cell, hears a voice from the other side of his prison wall. Thrust into each other's lives, the two men are separated by solid ground, divergent backgrounds and opposite worldviews. But

over time, they are drawn together as they battle dire conditions, loss of faith, and each other. This emotionally stirring new play affirms the extraordinary power of human connection to forge hope in even the darkest hours.

Cast

Steve Haggard*
 Nate Burger

Production Team

Kevin Depinet, U.S.A.:
Scenic Designer
 Rachel Anne Healy, U.S.A.:
Costume Designer
 Jesse Klug, U.S.A.:
Lighting Designer

Andrew Hansen:
Sound Designer
 Dina Spoerl:
Lobby Designer
 Maren Robinson:
Dramaturg
 Jinni Pike*:
Stage Manager
 John Kearns:
Production Manager

The director is a member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, a national theatrical labor union.

**Member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers.*

Those designers and scenic artists identified by U.S.A. are members of United Scenic Artists, IATSE Local 829, AFL-CIO.

OCTOBER 2012

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

NOVEMBER 2012

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
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4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

DECEMBER 2012

SU	M	T	W	TH	F	SA
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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

LOCATION

TimeLine Theatre
 615 W. Wellington Ave., Chicago
 Directions, parking and dining
 information at timelinetheatre.com

- **Regular Performance**
- **Preview Performance**
- **Opening Night *Sold Out***
- **Post-Show Discussion with cast & production crew *Free***
- **Sunday Scholars** a one-hour post-show panel discussion with experts on the themes and issues of the play *Free*
- **Company Member Discussion** a conversation with TimeLine's Company members *Free*

SHOW TIMES

PREVIEWS 8 PM
*(Except 2 pm & 7 pm on 10/14;
 also 4 pm on 10/13)*

OPENING NIGHT 7:30 PM

WEDNESDAYS & THURSDAYS 7:30 PM

FRIDAYS 8 PM *(Also 4 pm on 11/23)*

SATURDAYS 4 PM & 8 PM

SUNDAYS 2 PM