

WINTER'S TALES
A PLAY ABOUT HOCKEY, CURLING, AND AGING MEN

Stephanie Dotto & Kristi A. Allain

SCENE 1: Active Aging (INTERVIEWER)

INTERVIEWER delivers a classroom lecture from the side of the stage.

INTERVIEWER: We are limited in the ways we understand what it might mean to age well. But when sports like curling or hockey focus on inclusive physical activity, celebrate diverse bodies, and encourage interdependence instead of independence, we might also see diverse and interdependent ways to celebrate aging well.

But to understand why this is important, we have to go back to the beginning. Specifically, I'm going to take you back to my beginnings, before I studied sport, before I studied older men, before I was a professor. In Peterborough, where I grew up, hockey was a kind of religion. (*Clicks a lecture "slide" that is a tableau of the men from the next scene standing at attention, singing the national anthem*). It was the home of the CHL's Peterborough Petes, and claimed to have developed more NHL players and coaches than any other place.

INTERVIEWER becomes more casual with her students, walks out from the podium, maybe perches on a table.

The Petes would host these public skates, and there's pictures of me as a tiny three-year old in the arms of these massive hockey players on the ice.

I went to Petes games on Thursday nights with my family even when I was an undergrad and it was like profoundly uncool. It kept me kind of connected to them after I left home.

(*Becoming more formal, returning behind the podium.*) Eventually I came to study young men's hockey, but the more I studied it, the less of a fan I became. And now I'm (*pause*) I wouldn't say I'm a fan anymore. It's hard these days to overlook. (*Pause*). But I like being in the rinks with the older men, curlers or hockey players, and watching them play and hearing them talk.

SCENE 2: One Of The Young Guys (INTERVIEWER, CLYDE, ELMER, FRANÇOIS, WALTER, WILSON)

Actors still in tableau standing in a row, at attention. National anthem plays overhead. INTERVIEWER crosses into the tableau as CLYDE steps out of the line to talk to the INTERVIEWER.

CLYDE: Well, where do I start?

INTERVIEWER: At the beginning.

CLYDE: At the beginning?

INTERVIEWER: Mmmhmm.

CLYDE: That's 60 years ago. I played a high level of hockey, and—and I think I still need to have that quickness or, I don't know, it's just, I enjoy it more when it's challenging, I guess.

WILSON, still in the line, hears CLYDE boasting, leaves the line to come join him.

INTERVIEWER: How old are you?

WILSON: Sixty-six.

INTERVIEWER: Sixty-six. How long have you been playing hockey?

WILSON: (*Chuckles*) Sixty years. I just—I think it still—that it just makes you feel younger that you can still play hockey. You know, playing on a team with a bunch of older guys, it just gives you a bit of a feeling that you still have a little bit of it in you. (*Laughs.*)

CLYDE: A few years ago, my uh, nephew had organized a hockey game with his son and a bunch of his friends at the uh, the big rink in town. And uh, so he invited me to go and play, and I was the oldest there, and I could — I could skate circles around [*chuckle*] the fourteen and fifteen-year-olds. And uh, uh, so yeah, if you can do things like that and feel that you can still compete, it keeps you going.

WALTER and ELMER leave the line to join WILSON, CLYDE, and INTERVIEWER.

WILSON: And the people that, that haven't had a lot of experience, but at their age they're playing more now, and I can actually see them getting better you know, they're—they're playing with their heads up, they're shooting a little better, even at the age of over fifty they're improving, which sort of amazes me.

WALTER: We have guys that have shoulder problems, back problems, leg problems, but when they are on the ice, they think that they are one of the young guys out there on TV that they see. When you go out, you think you're Sidney Crosby. But if someone showed you the video, you might never put on skates again, so.

ELMER: Skating around the ice, I felt seventeen until I looked in the glass and I saw this old guy looking back at me. [*Pause*]

INTERVIEWER: Is it valuable to feel young?

FRANÇOIS responds. He is sitting on a bench apart from the others.

FRANÇOIS: The team I was on last year, the guys wanted to win more, that was more important than anything, so they kicked all the old guys like me off the team (*short laugh*). It seems to be happening now in that league and I don't like it, yeah. Uninviting players to return the next year, and picking up younger guys so that they'll win more games.

ELMER: Um, (*pause*) I wouldn't want to be young again and have to put up with that shit, but um (*pauses and sighs*) just I don't [*chuckle*]— I don't want people to look at me the way I looked at my dad when I was young.

INTERVIEWER: Why wouldn't you want people to look at you the way you looked at your dad at the same age?

ELMER: It's not right. It's — see I've learned that you have to give people the benefit of the doubt and that uh, you know, that old guy shuffling down with the cane / you don't know.

FRANÇOIS: It's not, that's not what I think Oldtimers hockey is all about. Oldtimers hockey is for playing the game, having fun, not so much about winning. And so you should play until you feel you can't play yourself.

ELMER: He may have been a vet, he may have done exactly what you did. Um, like when — you see so many of the great documentaries on the guys that went to war. And they were kids. And uh, when, when they're my age, you know, you look at them and you can't relate between that eighteen-year-old kid and that sixty-eight-year-old man.

WALTER: I was out yesterday playing on the back rink with the kids so you know, there's still a passion there, that little boy in me? To see a little kid smile or put their arms up when they score — I grew up that way.

WILSON: My wife says all the time, she says, "When are you going to grow up?" I hope never. I still feel like I'm 30. Like honestly, I can't even believe I am 66 years old. "Will, you're 66!" "Oh yeah, right."

ELMER: I mean, how can they be the same person? But his memories of that eighteen-year-old kid is still there so we should give him a chance to explain (*pause*) that he's not—you know, physically he's a sixty-eight-year-old man but mentally he may not be. I think that's the big thing, mentally we're not.

As ELMER speaks, the voices of boys yelling and playing become louder and louder.

SCENE 3: Six Cents Worth of Gas (INTERVIEWER, AMOS, ANDREW, CLINT, FRANÇOIS, KENNETH, STACY, WALTER, WILSON)

CLYDE and ELMER exit. AMOS, ANDREW, and STACY join the rest onstage.

AMOS: There was a big lawn in between the houses so at night, we would play at night, and we would knock on people's doors and get them to turn their lights on and that was our lights for hockey at night.

ANDREW: We flooded the rinks ourselves, um borrowing a few rubber hoses and uh tapping in to an out-outdoor tap, and if it didn't reach, we did buckets. (*The boys mime passing water buckets along a line*)

AMOS: And, sometimes you're, you're skating against the wind, it keeps you upright. *Laughs.*

FRANÇOIS: My mom would yell at me, "François, François!" to get me to come in and at least have supper or something (*laughs*) and then I'd go back out, but we would just play until the wee hours.

WALTER: We had a couple of ponds, and you could roll an old tire down there. Fill it with gas — six cents worth of gas would start the tire burning, and the tire would burn for three or four hours. Keep you warm. If you got cold, you went to the tire. And if we were going to play all day, we would roll two tires down and start one in the morning, one in the afternoon. By the time the tires run out and we were cold, we would go home. *Chuckles.*

WILSON: I grew up in Newfoundland. So ponds and bays and woods and so forth were my playground. On the bays chasing the puck, you know. If you miss the net — if you miss the two big rocks, you have to chase the puck down the bay to get it back!

CLINT and KENNETH enter, to the bewilderment of the others.

CLINT: I started curling when I was 10 years old. TV didn't come to our town until 1954, so there was no TV when you went home. You couldn't plug into your little game situation, so what do you do in the wintertime? You curl. When I wasn't down throwing the big rocks, we were curling jam can. Jams were sold in a metal container back then. What you do is bash the bottom out, so it would roll on the ice nicely. There was no handle; you just pushed it. But it was good for the kids, and in public school, that's what we started with.

KENNETH: We used the big adult rocks. And curling was basically a smoker's game from a child's point of view. There were butt cans hung down from the ceiling and you used adult brooms and threw adult rocks. It was a company town and the curling club was a company curling club, so, anything that revolved around there had a company flavor.

Other men chase CLINT and KENNETH offstage.

STACY: Because the snowplows weren't great sixty odd years ago, the road would actually freeze up and when you're little and you put your skates on, you could still bop up and down the road on frozen snow, right? And then I lived at the east end of town, almost on the marsh, and the ditches that formed the marsh would freeze up so you could put your skates on on the back porch and skate down the ditch to the rink, and just spend a whole day playing hockey. *(The men start playing more aggressively)*

INTERVIEWER: *(“Clicks” and the men freeze in a hockey-playing tableau).* As a woman, though, it's a very gendered experience. There was a skating rink at the end of my street growing up, but I hated the hockey. It was terrible, like you couldn't skate. I was a little tiny girl, and people were winging pucks. The hockey was taking over. My mother was taking me home, she said, “It's dangerous.”

STACY: Hockey was a working-class sport. I lived in a factory town, and my dad worked at the factory and my mum worked check-out at the grocery store, and what kids did in the winter was play hockey. There were a few sparrow-chested thin guys who played basketball and stayed inside during the winter, but most of us just went outside and played hockey all the time.

SCENE 4: Making Memories/Along Came Family (INTERVIEWER, AMOS, ANDREW, CLYDE, FRANÇOIS, STACY, STEVE)

INTERVIEWER is behind podium again.

INTERVIEWER: My family boarded a Russian player for the Petes. Sasha came to stay with us the year I left for university. He was 16, he was a Muscovite, he was skinny, he had such an accent. This was post-Cold War but there still wasn't a lot of freedom and he'd had to steal his passport from his coach in the Red Army to come to North America to play hockey.

Sasha became family very very quickly. We got him into our home. We loved, we love him. We fed him. We learned a lot. My mother kept him home after he went to school and he wasn't learning anything. She home-schooled him and taught him English and got him through high school. So again, sport and family were very connected for me.

INTERVIEWER "clicks" to next slide. Lights up on AMOS, ANDREW, CLYDE, FRANÇOIS, and STACY, in a family-style tableau.

FRANÇOIS: I'm from a small village out west. My parents were not interested in sports or hockey. And of course, my dad never had the time, because he had to put bread on the table.

And there was no organized hockey. But one guy, he owned the stores in another small village. He decided to form a team. So, we went there, he trained us, we went to the tournaments, and the two years that I was playing, we won. Both, both years, which was totally amazing for that small village because there were teams coming from all over the province, even the big cities. I still have the trophies, they're a bit beat up. So, that was the spark to me. To go to a tournament, maybe twenty kilometres away, it was a big deal.

STACY: If you were lucky and you got in the station wagon that was carrying the goalie equipment, you could put the pads out in the back and sleep. This was pre-Trans-Canada, and in the winter of 67/68, it was about an eight-hour drive to the tournament. *(Falls asleep)*

FRANÇOIS: We had to stop in the capital to play a game against a team that had like matching socks and matching sweaters and matching gloves and we thought that was just awesome. We were just a bunch of country bumpkins with a bunch of kind of feed-bag-like sweaters.

CLYDE: I had no uh, parental support, uh, and at that time we only had the one arena which was on the west side, and I lived on the east side! My mother would always drive me to the game, but I was a good enough goalie that the other teams would want me to play, and well by the time I walked home, uh, it was 1:00 in the morning. So, I gave that up.

- AMOS: I was born and raised on a farm. I played for a couple of years, but the timeslot for hockey started interfering with chore time. So, my dad said, "You're not playing hockey because we need you to do chores." And uh, so, I never played again till I was uh, Juvenile, I was driving in.
- CLYDE: My parents never saw me play hockey, never saw me play football. *Chuckles.* I uh, would've-would've liked some attention. They dwelled on my—my older brother, yeah, but uh, anyway, I've made out alright. I um, had a hard time coming into this world. Parents were told — so my aunt told me — take me home and love me, won't live a month. Here I am, decades later, still kicking. *Laughs.*
- So, that's why I raised my kids how I did. I never missed a swim meet. I never miss my uh, any events with the kids or the grandchildren.
- ANDREW: We followed our kids around religiously. In fact, our vacations were, for probably ten years, scheduled around the boys' summer hockey and their winter hockey. And so our vacation trips were to Toronto, Halifax, Boston. We weren't going to Aruba or Mexico. Friends used to say, "Do you know how much you pay for your kids' hockey and travel and all this stuff?" I used to tell them, "No, and I don't want to add it up because I know it'd be a big number and I would much sooner enjoy this and not be aware of little things like that."
- STEVE: My wife was a very good curler; we curled mixed together, and we curled in a weekend bonspiel. And we had a wonderful time, and we got home on Sunday. And the kids said the Easter Bunny didn't come that year. We had completely missed it. That's the last time we were neglecting our kids, you know. *Laughs.* We cried almost as much as they did.
- AMOS: I stopped playing once I had my three boys. Because uh, they were playing once a week each, and—and there was three uh, practices, and my equipment got kind of spread around. *(Doles out equipment to other actors)*
- STACY: *(Wakes up, looks at the familial scenes around him, and scoffs)* A friend said, "There's a bunch of guys playing on Sunday mornings, why don't you come out?" And my-my wife was in the choir at the church, and my kids too, and I'm not a religious person, I'm not even Anglican *(pause)*, and I thought, "I could spend my time better at the rink than sitting here for an hour and a half getting steamed about what is going on." So I started playing hockey again.

STACY and AMOS exit.

SCENE 5: Knock-On (INTERVIEWER, ANDREW, CLYDE, FRANÇOIS)

Lights come back up on INTERVIEWER, in informal stance.

INTERVIEWER: I think over the time that Sasha lived with us we learned a lot about the ins and outs of the league. The way they treated him was . . . gross.

Every year they had a kind of prank Christmas party and they bought Sasha pink flannel pajamas because he was, he spent so much time at home with my mom. And my mom was the only person for a long time that he felt really comfortable with because she was patient and she could communicate with him. *(Pause)*. He was 16. (*“Clicks” a tableau of Andrew, Clyde, and François fighting.*) They thought he was soft because he was Russian. He had to fight with his teammates to gain respect on the team. Which brings me back to one of my points.

The violence in men’s elite-level hockey comes in a myriad of forms, from abuse of players by their coaches, hazing, players sexually assaulting women, racialized players facing racism from their teammates and fans, and the deaths and brain injuries of players who took too many hits to the head.

INTERVIEWER “clicks” ANDREW, FRANÇOIS, and CLYDE into another tableau. They sit and stand, as background sounds (beeping, intercom announcements) suggest they are in an emergency room.

ANDREW: Our son played high level hockey. *(Pause)*. But he got severely hurt in his first year of midget and we almost lost him, so it uh he—he—it changed his outlook on hockey.

INTERVIEWER: What bonds these acts together is their connection to the long history of what is increasingly being called “hockey culture.” What these men and boys learn from one another is violent masculinity.

ANDREW: He, it—it was uh one of these situations, he took a hit and had a bad fall, broke his femur. He almost bled to death. He, uh, he was on life support for uh a couple of weeks. I lost ten years off my life.

CLYDE: Don Cherry, he talks about how even in the NHL, he criticizes some players because they put themselves in a position to get injured.

ANDREW: It certainly — watching him play after that, we were always a little more nervous. He still plays recreational hockey, but it didn’t have the focus

after the injury. Anyway, he's — (*knocks on seat*) knock on wood — he's grown now, I got two lovely grandchildren.

CLYDE: Going in with their head down face in the boards, when they know they're going to get hit. You've got to try to avoid situations where you can get hurt.

FRANÇOIS: I had a collision um eighteen months ago with a guy on the ice, we both turned at the same time, and they had to take him off the ice on a back board and the ambulance came, and he - he's done, couldn't play anymore.

What's taken a lot of people out that I've played with are um knee and shoulder and neck injuries, [*pause*] concussions from having their feet taken out from under them and landing on the back of their head, pinched nerves in their neck from collisions, running into the boards.

There was one guy, he went into the goalie and the boards head-first, and he's a paraplegic.

CLYDE: Players are going to bump and, and they're going to push and they're going to try to fight for the puck. Uh, you need to do it in a position so you're not going to be prone to injury. And, I've been lucky so far. Knock on wood.

ANDREW: [*Chuckles*] Our grandson, he's five, he just started hockey this year so.

SCENE 6: Under the Bus

INTERVIEWER: When Sasha was with us there was a Ukrainian kid in the league, and they forgot to renew his work visa and they were playing a team on the other side of the border. So they um chucked him into the baggage hold of the team bus and drove him over the border. No heat, in the middle of the night, this Ukrainian kid smuggled under the bus.

(*Returns to podium*). I think all this changed my understanding of hockey. It wasn't just the treatment, it was the treatment combined, combined with the fact that everybody you spoke to talked about how *privileged* they were as Russians or other Europeans to have this experience.

And so I wanted to understand it, and that's why I became a sports scholar.

But my interviews with young men were painful sometimes. You would ask a question that should elicit ten minutes of talking and they'd be — it was just a lot of mumbling. Even the Russians. Their parents had lived through Stalin, they were careful about what they told strangers.

(“Clicks” a tableau of men from scene 7, standing in a cluster, secretively, backs to interviewer.) But also just the culture of hockey, that everything that happens is a secret. The culture of hockey masculinity is not one that's about like deep emotion and sharing with others.

SCENE 7: An Organ Recital (INTERVIEWER, AMOS, ANDREW, CLYDE, ELMER, FRANÇOIS, STACY, WALTER, WILSON)

The men are in the tableau from the previous scene. STACY breaks the tableau to talk to INTERVIEWER.

STACY: —I was going to tell you, I was thinking about what I was going to say about this, and uh when I first started playing with this crowd, I would have been in my mid-thirties, the primary discussion in the dressing room was hockey and women. But in the last, I don't know five years, the primary discussion is now hockey and golf. *[Pause]* Yeah it's kind of a, kind of a sad reflection on where we are in life.

AMOS: I think when some guys are younger they might be less respectful of women, but I find you don't get any of that kind of talk um now.

ANDREW: I would say that any woman could sit in our dressing room. Every once in a while, somebody might say something, you know, crude, but uh, most of the time, no. Takes—takes twenty or thirty years to get past that.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think it takes twenty or thirty years to get over that?

ANDREW: I never thought about that. I think it's like a, the younger the group, the more they want to talk about their sexual prowess. But at seventy-five, you don't have to prove anything anymore.

WILSON: It gets less as they—when—where does it really start to get less? Perhaps—perhaps at eighty *[laughs]*. Oh, oh dear.

The men cross into the locker room, while the interviewer stands alone.

INTERVIEWER: *(To audience, formally)* There's a journal article called "When a Looker is Really a Bitch." And it's about a woman journalist who, they try and run her out of the locker room by saying, she's like, she's looking, she's

looking. They're trying to make her so uncomfortable that she can't stay. But there's interviews with other people who say it's impossible to, to not look because you're surrounded by 25 naked people — there's nowhere else to look.

But the first time I went to interview the old guys, my contact for the team was like, "Just come on into the dressing room, they'll be getting dressed, but it'll be fine." I was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." (*Enters the "locker room"*). But when I went in there was just like, 15 half-dressed, very old men.

(*To the men*) You know, men's sports are often associated with a kind of, sociologists call it "cut talk" — a kind of way of, you know, keeping people in check through teasing—

CLYDE: Oh yeah! Razzing. Being one of the old guys, you get razzed a lot. You've got to develop the same sort of tongue, so when one guy gives it to you, you can nail him back.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of things are up for razzing?

FRANÇOIS: The way you might play, the way you drink your beer, the way you might open your beer.

AMOS: If you miss a shot or take it too seriously.

ELMER: You made a stupid play, you scored a goal on our goalie.

FRANÇOIS: The way you stumble across the dressing room to go to the shower.

ELMER: If there's something that can be said to razz you up a little bit, it's going to come out.

STACY: But if you know that somebody's got a sore spot, you just, you don't pick at it. It's-it's not about hurting people.

ELMER: One of the guys just made his funeral arrangements, you know, prepaid arrangements, and asked me, "Why haven't you got yours done? You're going to need it soon." [*Laughs*]

WALTER: We had a guy, Paddy. He just passed away about a month ago. But the guys would bug him. Somebody would come out of the shower, and you knew he was coming in, you'd turn the cold water on. He would curse

and swear and everything! [*Chuckles*]. And somebody would do the same thing to you too!

WILSON: There is a lot of appreciation too. "Oh geez you had a great shot, geez you got a hat trick."

INTERVIEWER: (*To audience*). The project started to be a project about bodies. I was looking at masculinity and—and body changes over the life course. So, you know, how do men sixty, seventy, eighty, how do they understand their bodies through the acts of—of doing curling or hockey, and how has that changed over their life?

AMOS: A month ago, I went to the coast, and I walked up Dunlop Mountain. And I thought, "I am getting a bit of exercise, because I have to climb up this thing," until some young girl came jogging with her dog and ran by me. AMOS makes a motion with his hands to indicate that the girl zoomed right past him. INTERVIEWER laughs. And I said I think there is something wrong with how I am doing this.

INTERVIEWER: (*to guys*) I've heard a rumor that in the dressing room, one of the things is that people talk about their bellies.

STACY: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. "Oh hey, Stacy, are you auditioning for Santa Claus?" [*Laughs*]. I'm getting fatter as I'm getting older. I've never been a gym person, I was a pudgy little kid, I looked terrible in shorts, and that hasn't improved with age, right?

INTERVIEWER: Does it bother you, to watch your body age?

ANDREW: There are things, you know, [*sigh*] I eat raisins and I get gas now, I don't know why but—I don't mean to get personal.

AMOS: Uh, I hate the nose hair and the ear hair, I—that is not fair. God is not being fair there.

ELMER: A few years ago, I had been on anti-inflammatories for quite a while, a guy said to me, "Oh my back's hurt," and I said, "Why don't you take an Advil?" "Oh, I don't want to take an Advil." I said, "You know, I don't want to either, but I wouldn't be here if I didn't."

STACY: By the time that you get into your sixties, the warranty on almost everything is off. Um people who are inactive get joint pain and get problems, people who are active get joint pain and get problems.

ANDREW: I look at myself in the mirror and say, “Oh not what you used to be but you're still here,”

ELMER: A lot of our jokes are about ourselves. We joke a lot about how our wives shrink our pants and everything, you know? [*Chuckles*]

WALTER: I—I generally wear ankle supports, and I have got about half dressed and forgot to put those on, so you take everything back off and start again. We—we always kid one another, “What? Did you not bring your list with you?” [*Chuckles*] You know, if you took it really serious, it'd drive you crazy.

ANDREW: Locker room talk, now it's more like an organ recital [*chuckle*]. You know, one guy says he can't go to lunch today because tomorrow he's got to, oh what's the word? Um, god, the medical term when they've got to check your lower bowel for cancer.

WALTER: A colonoscopy!

ANDREW: A colonoscopy. Like I said, everyone is talking about their complaints. It's an organ recital.

SCENE 8: Big Adult Rocks (INTERVIEWER, CLINT, STEVE, KENNETH)

INTERVIEWER: (*At podium*). In 2014, I had this student, she was like an elite curler, Elizabeth. And she said, you know, my dad wanted to be a curler. He wanted to retire into curling and had sort of imagined that he could be very good at it. But then he saw Team Brad Jacobs. (*“Clicks” tableau of CLINT, STEVE, AND KENNETH, posing as young buff curlers*).

Brad Jacobs led the 2014 gold-medal-winning Canadian men's curling team at the Sochi Olympics. Before this point, curling had often been associated with older people, and bodies that weren't outwardly muscular or buff.

But Team Brad Jacobs were younger, bigger, visibly muscular, aggressive. They did interviews where they were described as “super agro,” and they bragged about being mistaken for hockey players. George Stroumboulopoulos interviewed them and declared an end to the era of jokes about “someone's dad winning a medal in curling.”

So my student's dad saw this and he said, “Oh I guess curling's not for me.” He saw that curling was taking this youthful turn and it sent this powerful message to him about what the possibilities were for older men

in the sport, and. And so I set out to find out what the sport meant to older men, (*“Clicks a tableau of Clint, Kenneth, and Steve, being useful.”*) and I found that many were not only fierce curlers, but they were teaching young kids curling, doing maintenance, organizing leagues, and keeping the curling tradition alive.

INTERVIEWER crosses to CLINT.

CLINT: I brought along all my press clippings. Do you want to look at those things?

INTERVIEWER: Sure.

CLINT: (*Laughs.*) If you could tell by the colour of the paper, they're a little old.

INTERVIEWER: They've been around?

CLINT: Yeah. Where are we here . . . oh gosh I may not even have the, I may have cut the dates off. (*Unfolds the clippings, laughs.*) Oh dear. Where's my glasses? Oh yeah. *Laughs.*

INTERVIEWER: So you competed at a high level?

CLINT: (*Sits down.*) Well, yeah, sure. In the 50s, the Hayes brothers had won the National Brier. And then they had agreed to come and play at our club, in a spiel we were having. And so they won their first game and in the second game we played them, and I think that's—

INTERVIEWER: (*Picks one of the press clippings.*) That's this one. You upset them.

CLINT: Yeah, that's when we beat them, so, we gave the Canadian champions their first defeat. (*Laughs.*)

INTERVIEWER: You must have been very proud, yeah?

CLINT: Well, they had all the stands set up behind the glass and whatnot, and there were a lot of people coming to see and they had a couple of extra bars open and the club was making a little money and all of a sudden boom, the Hayes are out, they take down the bleachers. (*Laughs.*) So we weren't very popular with some of the members, but.

INTERVIEWER: Is curling a good sport for old people?

KENNETH: Yes. It gets them out of the house. I think that is important. That's how I got the sticks here.

INTERVIEWER: *(to audience)* Stick curling is a modification in the game that allows curlers to release the curling stone from a standing position. This allows curlers with mobility issues, specifically those who cannot get down into a deep lunge, to throw the stone from a standing position.

In regular club play, stick curlers sometimes curl alongside non-stick curlers. They can also play their own version of the sport, in their own leagues.

KENNETH: I put in a grant — we were a non-profit corporation, but we weren't a senior center so we weren't allowed to apply for this grant. Well, I was pissed off. There was no reason we shouldn't be — in my mind, we qualified for it. So I had to go down, and this is not a word a lie, I had to go down on my hands and knees to the town's senior centre, who were accredited, and get them to cosign, so we could get sticks, and they refused. And boy, I was not a nice person. I was a little aggressive. I don't mind telling you. So they called me back later, and they did apologize and said they would sign. We got the sticks and we put them out there in September a whole bunch of years ago.

INTERVIEWER: Sticks were a... contentious issue in my interviews.

KENNETH: And I heard from five or six senior male curlers — and this was probably a male reaction — “I am going to tell you, if I have to use one of them I am going to quit the damn game.”

CLINT: I think it's wonderful that people that need to use a stick can. But I'm a believer that you should do a sport as natural as it was intended to be. You know, if you're physically able, then you should. I'll curl standard as much as I can.

You know, it's like tennis. They are trying to bring in this pickle ball, you know, they are muddying the waters. And stick curling seems more like shuffleboard or whatever you call that. You know what the old... older people play on the cement with discs?

One of the guys that I curled with for many years just simply refused to go to the stick. He had a hip replacement, and it was the only way he would be able to play the game. So he just gave the game up. We tried to talk him into coming back, but he won't. *(Laughs)*. Probably a traditionalist. A pure traditionalist.

STEVE: The biggest hurdle to stick curling is people's pride. “No damn way I am going up there to throw a rock with a stick.” We still have quite a few of those members around here.

- CLINT: I think that would be part of it. I have a knee injury, and eventually, it is going to be difficult to get down in the hack —
- INTERVIEWER: The hack is an object, similar to a starting block in running, that curlers playing the unmodified game push off of in order to slide forward and throw the curling stone.
- CLINT: So then chances are I am not able to run either, so a number of things will start to signal to me that I am getting old. I would find that a little bit of a kick to the ego.
- STEVE: Some people are afraid to try it, that'll hold them back. Some people won't ask for help, that's a big thing. If you get somebody to go out there and help you.
- KENNETH: So the sticks sat there for a year, maybe even two, maybe even three,

Then the ladies started using them the odd day. They started using them more and more. Then, the ladies invited the men to play. Then a couple of the men started using them on a regular basis. Well all of a sudden, we had five or six men using them on a regular basis, and there wasn't the stigma attached to them. Whether it was a mental stigma or whatever it was. And after that, it was everybody started using them. So now, we have a stick league on Thursday morning, which probably has 70 people involved in it.
- STEVE: We won the stick provincials, twice. And then some of the guys, after we won, they wanted us to come out and instruct them with the stick. So I come out with them, and they'll say, "Will you watch me?" or "will you come out with me?" And I don't mind that, I enjoy it. So it's interesting to watch them improve, you know, with the stick. And of course, the better they get, the better they like the stick.
- INTERVIEWER: So how did you make the transition to stick curling?
- STEVE: Very easy. I had an operation, I have a new knee and a new hip. So it wasn't hard to go to a stick. I could get down but I couldn't get up. And it's just a matter of practicing. If you're going to do anything right, you have to practice at it.

And we've been invited, like I go around the area. They ask me to come to instruct the stick, to help them get started. And you'd be amazed, there's usually about 30, 35 people, new to the stick.
- INTERVIEWER: So in that way, would you say it is good? Some of the modifications have allowed people to extend their lives?

STEVE: Oh yeah, for me, that's an A-plus factor that allows them to keep going.

KENNETH: But it didn't happen overnight. It took a bit of tugging and booting and all that sort of stuff to get the senior men to buy into it. It doesn't necessarily happen automatically. I won't say stick and a carrot, but I think some carrot is necessary.

SCENE 9: HOCKEY HEAVEN (INTERVIEWER, CLINT, STACY, WALTER, WILSON)

INTERVIEWER: *(to audience)* Many of the curlers I interviewed had played hockey earlier in their lives too, but they didn't continue with the sport beyond mid-life. They frequently associated hockey with serious injury, disability and even death.

CLINT: I have known too many people that drop dead playing hockey that I said after I was 40, that was enough for hockey.

INTERVIEWER: These curlers felt it necessary to avoid playing hockey due to the risk it posed to the body, potentially leading to impairments that would obstruct their ability to engage in other active aging activities — like curling.

CLINT: The problem is you get competitive, and you push it. In fact, a favorite saying with a doctor in town, he says, "It's alright. They went to hockey heaven." Well, I don't want to go quite yet to hockey heaven.

WILSON and INTERVIEWER stand in front of a gravestone-like object.

WILSON: I had a um *[pause]* anxiety problems um in the last few years, and uh I had several panic attacks having to do with-with hockey games. And taking myself up to the emergency room — "Oh I think I'm having a heart attack, I think I'm about to die." But I seem to have uh solved that anxiety problem, and now I realize that *[pause]* the risk is there, but I-I don't want to be one of those-a person that's in an old folks' home sort of sitting in a comatose state in a chair for four, five, ten years, just sort of drooling, you know? *[He begins acting out his death fantasy.]* Um, and I sort of have this fantasy of-of you know, tearing down the ice and scoring a goal, losing my footing, and crashing into the boards, and banging my head and just gone like that. That's sort of a fantasy death for me, is to just score a goal and then die and it would be the end.

Men start filing in to pay their respects to the gravestone, talking as they go.

STACY: We joke sometimes, "I hope I die after my last goal." [*Chuckles.*] You know? Not that I hope I die, but if I'm gonna have to go on the ice, I hope it's after my last goal. You know, that's a good goal in life, isn't it?

WALTER: The way I look at it is if I drop dead on the ice, I was going to drop dead somewhere anyway because I have a problem. So it might as well be out there having some fun thinking I'm going to get a couple beers with the guys when I'm done.

You get the risk bending over to pick up a golf ball, I mean, walking down the street. So if you can stay active and enjoy it, why condemn us for it? [*Pause*] I don't want to end up [*pause*] on the outside looking in.

STACY: I played on a Friday night league one year, and uh, we kind of kidded uh, one was a doctor on our team, the other one was a priest, so if the doctor couldn't save you, we had the priest. [*Laughs*]

Some of the guys are always talking about, "Oh well I decided I wasn't going to play anymore because uh, I was scared I was going to have a heart attack." I challenge them, I say, "How many guys your age already dead? How many people do you know that never hit seventy? There's a lot! There's a lot! So, you're worried about reaching seventy and you're not dead yet? I mean, c'mon!" I don't know, I don't worry about dying. It'll happen when it happens, not too concerned. I've lived a full life.

SCENE 10: If Something Happens to Me (INTERVIEWER, ANNE, AMOS, STEVE, WALTER, WOMAN)

WALTER and ANNE are one side of the stage, STEVE at the other. They are mirror images of each other, except that the seat ANNE occupies is empty on Steve's side. STEVE also has a dog, Marlowe, who exists through sounds and mimed interactions.

The INTERVIEWER toggles between them.

INTERVIEWER: (*To audience*). I was in high school, and I was watching a hockey game at this guy Trevor's house. Ron Hextall got in a fight with Patrick Roy or something and I was talking about it and then Trevor came into the room and just shut it down. He was like, "You've never played hockey." And yeah, I was mad. And that's sort of been constant, that people are just like, you don't know, or your interest in this can only be sexual. So, I would tell people about the work I did and people would be like, "Oh, wink, wink, nudge nudge. Young girl interested in junior hockey. We know why you're here." It was amazing to me what people thought was okay to say to like a young, a young researcher.

Women have played hockey since hockey was a thing. But I'm a—I'm a scholar of men. I study masculinities. So, I've interviewed men. But I have also interviewed their partners. And, I mean, to speak about men is to speak about women.

INTERVIEWER crosses to ANNE and STEVE.

ANNE: I'll just keep quiet.

INTERVIEWER: You can — you can participate as much as you'd like. I'm sure there are questions that you have some opinions on, too. Maybe not this one: how old are you?

WALTER: Seventy-six.

STEVE: I was born in 1941, so that makes me 76. (*Dog whines*). Sit, down. Sit.

INTERVIEWER: And are you still working?

STEVE: No, I retired in 2000.

WALTER: I retired, that'd be twelve years since Christmas, it'd be 2008.

ANNE: 2007.

WALTER: 2007, I guess.

INTERVIEWER: And how's that going?

WALTER: Good, I—I'd recommend it for anybody. (*Laughs*)

STEVE: Well, it was good until last year.

INTERVIEWER: What happened?

STEVE: My wife died.

INTERVIEWER: I'm sorry.

STEVE: Yeah. Yes, we had many, many years together. We had 40 years together, and last September, she passed on, and, uh, that's why it's kind of nice to have her around (*gesturing to dog*).

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

STEVE: Well, she is wandering.

INTERVIEWER: She's visiting.

STEVE: So yes, it has been great. We ended up doing all kinds of things. In the wintertime, we curled all the time, and in the summertime, we golfed all the time.

WALTER: You get up in the morning and whatever you decide to do, you do, eh? We do a lot of—in the summertime, we do a lot of ATVing. So, that gets us out and...

ANNE: We used to have a motorcycle.

WALTER: Yeah, we used to — we motorcycled for / over thirty years

STEVE: So retirement has been great 'til last year. That's unfortunate, but it happened. I met my wife in curling and, uh, and we got married, and the couple that were our best man and lady, we curled with them for 30 years, and made it to six provincial finals.

INTERVIEWER: Wow.

STEVE: My wife was a very good curler. She ended up winning two provincial championships, and, uh, and I don't know if you recognize these, all these banners here mean that somebody in the club has won a provincial championship. We ended up doing probably 25 bonspiels a year for 30 years, and every weekend we were somewhere.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about the differences between curling mixed with your wife and curling men's.

STEVE: There really wasn't a lot of difference there. You, at the end of the game, the guys would have a beer, and the girls would have a glass of wine. And, is that a difference? No (*laughs*). Here's an interesting picture. We flew out West in the middle of the summer, they had a summer bonspiel. There is my wife's curling team.

INTERVIEWER: Which one is your wife?

A woman walks by, stops to pet the dog.

WOMAN: Is this your dog?

STEVE: Yes, it is.

WOMAN: Oh, she's cute. Older?

STEVE: Eleven. Eleven, plus a whole bunch.

WOMAN: Oh, she's so soft.

STEVE: Well, she's feeling sort of left out, because I went golfing this morning.

WOMAN: So she was in the car with the windows down?

STEVE: Oh no, I went home and got her. I had lots of time.

INTERVIEWER: Is there a place in hockey, you know, I met Mrs. O'Sullivan, who had nothing but beautiful things to say about the team, and she talked about, you know, the day Danny forgot his elbow pads and how people in the dressing room really took it on to help and make sure that he got all of his equipment on, and took care of him. I'm really curious about how hockey in later life actually allows for a kind of care that maybe wasn't available to guys at thirty.

WALTER: True, yes. You—you—you look at it different when you're younger, I would say yes. Because —

ANNE: You don't think you're ever going to get old.

AMOS walks in center stage, carrying groceries, between the two groups.

INTERVIEWER: Would you consider the guys in the locker room —are they friends? Are they — is it a different kind of relationship?

Question is directed to WALTER, but AMOS answers.

AMOS: A different kind, yeah. I don't see them outside of this. I'm—my wife is—is—got really sick a few years ago—couple of years ago—three years ago in May, so uh, that's my main focus, is to get home and help. Like I do all the cooking, and cleaning, and buy all the groceries, and stuff like that. And uh, and I'm glad to do that, so this is uh, a release for me, but I don't hang around. Like, a lot of these guys go out for breakfast after, and a lot of them golf together, and uh, I, you know, I don't have that time.

INTERVIEWER: *(to Anne)* Do you ever worry about Walter's hockey?

ANNE: Possibly a little bit. I usually tell him, "Be careful!"

WALTER laughs.

ANNE: And of course I have my little speech. Um, I'm always glad when he gets back home, let's put it that way. That he, you know, hasn't got in a fight.

WALTER: *(Laughs)* Not yet.

AMOS: My wife would like me to quit now cause she's—she says, “When you go out with a hockey bag, I worry until you get back.” She became really sick with sepsis, almost lost her, and uh, now it's uh, it's—it's left her restricted so, and yeah, we've been in the same place thirty-three years, and you know, it's—there's a lot of outside and inside work which I do and I'm glad to, but she—she worries that if something happens to me, what's gonna—what do we do then?

ANNE: You know, like do I sit here and stir and worry? No, I don't, but there's still *(exhales)*, you know, when he actually is home again.

STEVE: I have one other thing to give you.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

STEVE: These are pictures of the old downtown club. And when it burned down, they turned some of it into a parking lot. But that is what it used to look like.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm.

STEVE: And then these are the presidents at this time and this is the upstairs. People who won something, my wife is right there. And then it burned down.

Dog whines.

STEVE: *(Affectionately.)* Marlowe! Yes. It's okay. Can you sit? Yeah okay, there ya go. *(To INTERVIEWER)* I saved most of these photos and one of the other chaps combined them into a book. There it is burning, we all went down to watch it burn.

INTERVIEWER: That must have been hard.

STEVE: We actually just came back from out of town when it was burning, so we didn't lose anything from the locker rooms were upstairs. All kinds of people lost fur coats and everything — that's what they claimed in their insurance anyway.

SCENE 11: The Golden Years (INTERVIEWER, ELMER, KENNETH)

KENNETH and ELMER enter and walk to separate café tables. KENNETH is slow and bit shaky. INTERVIEWER speaks from lectern as they do so.

INTERVIEWER: We get these stories about the competitiveness of youth and how that takes kind of a backseat when they're older to more inclusiveness. *Crosses to Kenneth.* So, there's something that happens in these men where I think the kind of mortality of—of life and—and the physical changes of the body, they create these really lovely sports spaces that are inclusive. So, they want to find room to help the person with Alzheimer's or cancer or Parkinson's. They'll say "You know, I just give that guy a lot of space because you — I don't want to bump him because he'll fall, and we really want him to play as long as possible." And it's because these guys themselves want to be able to play as long as possible. They can see themselves through the stories of their teammates.

KENNETH: I am 69 years old. Born in 47—I don't know whether the math works out or not, but.

INTERVIEWER laughs.

KENNETH: Approximately, right?

INTERVIEWER: Are you still working?

KENNETH: No, I am retired.

INTERVIEWER: And how has retirement been for you?

KENNETH: I was looking forward to the golden years. The golden years aren't golden.

INTERVIEWER: No?

KENNETH: Well, they are golden in some respects. You know, the fact that they send you money and you can do whatever you want. All that good stuff, but, uh, everybody has health issues. I shouldn't say everybody, but the vast majority have health issues.

Lights up on INTERVIEWER and ELMER, sitting together.

INTERVIEWER: You must have had players like, experience health—changes in their health, or players who have even gone to nursing homes—

ELMER: —Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: How do you deal with that? Or how does the—

ELMER: Well, we're very um, we get very close eh, and when you someone dies or goes to a nursing home, or a guy like um, Danny uh, what's his name, uh, that has the...

INTERVIEWER: Mr. O'Sullivan?

ELMER: O'Sullivan, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I was speaking with Mrs. O'Sullivan, who was saying that the team helps him get dressed and—

ELMER: —Yeah, yeah, we make sure, yeah. You know, last week it was, um, I wasn't playing because of my back, but Danny's team was playing so I was out watching, and I saw his daughter.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm.

ELMER: And I saw her there talking to him on the bench and then running out. So, finally I went out to, to see what was going on, and she said, "Well, I can't find dad's water bottle. And it's in his equipment, but I don't know which equipment!" (*Chuckles*) Well, you know what a dressing room looks like.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah.

ELMER: So anyway, we found his water bottle, and took it out to him and away they went.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have health issues?

KENNETH: Oh yeah.

INTERVIEWER: And does that frustrate you?

KENNETH: No, not really. My health issues are potentially serious, but they aren't bad. I have Parkinson's.

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm.

KENNETH: Which means at some point, maybe I'll be in a wheelchair, and I won't be able to feed myself, but that was, it was probably five or six years ago. So I have tremors that are basically under control now and basically good.

ELMER: And we had another chap, his name was André and he played hockey with us, but he had, it's almost like um, when you get the shakes. And uh, he played right up until about three years ago, and he played on my team, and—and I took a liking to André, and we took care of him, we made sure he got home alright, and uh, when he was on the ice, nobody kind of went near him because he was very unsteady on his skates, but he loved the game. Two or three years ago, he—he quit playing. He told me, “Oh, I think I had better stop, I'm afraid I might hurt myself.”

INTERVIEWER: Mm-hm.

ELMER: I said, “That's—that's fine, but keep coming to the game. You'll be our coach.” And so, he did. And uh, he lived with his daughter Sophie. Anyway, last year, he was at a game on a Thursday, everything was fine, and then Sophie phoned me Saturday morning, she said, “My dad died.” But uh, the team really felt that. We'd go down to Montreal every year for a three-day tournament, and he'd come with us and in the dressing room he'd be running back and forth, helping everybody, and he had such a sharp wit. It was—it was really quite a shock to all of us. So, when we went to his celebration of life, my team wore the hockey sweaters there.

KENNETH: Everybody has health issues. A lot of the discussion in the morning among senior curlers here revolves around grandchildren and drugs and who is sick or in the hospital this week.

When I didn't curl last winter when I had a sore back, I would come here and make coffee and talk to the curlers and talk to the ladies, and then they would go out curling and I would go home. And that would be my activity for the day.

INTERVIEWER: Did that mean something to you?

KENNETH: Well, apparently it did, because I did it everyday for five days a week, and I looked forward to it, for social time, and all that sort of stuff. It was a place to go in the morning. I think that is important. I didn't think so a couple years ago, but I do now.

INTERVIEWER: What changed your mind?

KENNETH: Um, I guess getting old, getting older, I think / that was part of it.

As Elmer speaks, lights start narrowing on him.

ELMER: Every year that I go back to my hometown, there's getting to be less and less of my old friends there because you—they're passing on or they're moving away to a nursing home [*chuckles*]. You just try to keep going so you're not sitting at home and thinking, you know, about how old you are and what the hell is going to happen to me in the next year. We kid about our age, and I think that's a good thing. *Pause*. And that's—that's another thing, when we go to the nursing home, we'll be able to play down the hallway and stuff like this, you know [*chuckles*].

INTERVIEWER silently "clicks" one more time from lectern. *Lights come up on a tableau of men playing hall hockey, many from seated positions as if in wheelchairs, etc.*