Emily Dendinger
#GodHatesYou

Currently residing: Brooklyn, NY
Roots: Purcellville, VA

Creative beginnings: I was definitely interested in writing and theater at a young age. I was a ballerina until I was about 14 or 15, and dancing was definitely my gateway. I used to make my sisters reenact musicals in our basement, which are probably my earliest theater memories. We put on a mini production of the Opera’s, “The Magic Flute,” cast as myself as the lead, although, truth be told, my sister Erin is a far better actor than me.

I’ve always loved to read and write, so for the longest time I thought I would be a novelist and wrote a “book” in the fifth grade. I have a distinct memory of having a panic attack in middle school when I thought I would one day have to choose between being a writer and being a performer (for some reason, it didn’t occur to me that one could do both). Honestly, I think that was the moment I decided I would be a playwright. It seemed like the best way to combine everthing I loved.

Writing process: I constantly read—books, articles, websites articles, anything—so I feel like I’m always generating ideas for new plays. The ideas that stick with me are the ones that I know I need to pursue. My plays usually start with a topic or a character that sparks my interest. I’m really fascinated by complicated stories without easy answers or resolutions. Once I have an idea, I’ll usually embark on a long research process, learning everything I can about the topic. I take copious notes, and then almost never look at them. I read once that the playwright Tom Stoppard has a similar research process.

Then I’ll write a first draft. I write very quickly and am not a particularly precise writer. This means that my plays go through many, many drafts before I feel like they are anything close to production-ready. I also need to hear my play read aloud to understand what’s really there. Writing plays is closer to composing music than writing a novel or story. What’s on the page is only a blueprint, and this is where actors are so necessary to the process. Until I hear what’s on the page, I don’t really know what is there.

Origin of #GodHatesYou: This play was inspired by The New Yorker article about the experiences of a young woman who grew up in the Westboro Baptist Church, and has been in development with Curious Theatre Company since the article appeared in 2015.

Favorites from the play: Oh wow. That’s like asking me to pick if I have a favorite child. My favorite line or moment is constantly changing every time I see it, but I think my favorite moments often come from the audience. Watching an audience watch your play is the best feedback a playwright can get. You will know immediately what is working. The moments in the play when every member of the audience is leaning forward, when the theater is so quiet you can hear a pin drop, when you know every single person in that audience is with you and the actors on stage, those are my favorite moments.

Benefit from experience: Workshops like ANPF are invaluable to writers and the life of a play. Just having time, space, and access to access allows for copious amounts of work to be accomplished in a very short time. It is highly likely after our first read-thru on Monday, I’ll go home and rewrite huge chunks of the play and come into the play the next day with new pages. Just the time together, away from all the distractions of the day to day life, means we can really delve deep and consider what is working and what still needs more development.

I’m eager to make some pretty hefty revisions at ANPF, and I’m really curious to see how our audience will respond to them. When I started writing this play in early 2016, the world looked radically different than it does today. Then it was very much a play dealing with questions of religion. However, now, the play wants to shift to be a play about morality, especially when it comes to our behavior online and on social media. There are a lot of exciting questions I’m still wrestling with, and I’m eager to see how they manifest themselves in the play over the course of our week together.

#GodHatesYou
By Emily Dendinger
Directed by Chip Walton

Friday, January 25, 2019, at 7:30 pm
Unitarian Center, 87 Fourth St, Ashland

Presented by ANPF in collaboration with Curious Theatre Company of Denver, this performance will come after a weeklong intensive workshop.

Synopsis: Laurel has always been the apple of the church’s eye. She’s the first person to volunteer to picket funerals of death camp survivors, knows where to find a nerve in a crowd, and can debate the bible with the best of them. Despite the constant hate mail and death threats, she knows she’s saving the sinners of the world before the end of days arrives. However, when Laurel joins social media she’s faced for the first time with the outside world, and soon everything she believes is called into question. #GodHatesYou is what it means to grow up in a church dedicated to spreading hate and intolerance, and what happens when the faith you’ve vigorously adhered to your whole life is being shattered down around you.

Featuring: Jackie Apodaca, Cameron Davis, John Alan Hulbert, John Juncheck, Scott Kaiser, Stephanie Neuenburg, Nolan Sanchez, and Martha Thatcher.