

Swimming to Cambodia: December 12, 2001

In the summer of 2001, Gray was injured in a car accident while on vacation in Ireland with family and friends to celebrate his 60th birthday. In the accident, his hip was shattered, and his skull was fractured. He suffered from depression in the years following his accident and died of an apparent suicide in 2004.

Not long after his accident, Gray began a revival tour in late 2001 and 2002 of *Swimming to Cambodia*, which he performed at The Performance Garage, the Geary Theater in San Francisco, the Freud Playhouse in Los Angeles, the Goodman Theater in Chicago, and in Albany, New York. At many of these revival performances of *Swimming*, Gray begins with an introduction that describes his car accident in Ireland and his time in Irish hospitals. Parts of this introduction evolved into *Life Interrupted*, the monologue that Gray was working on when he died in 2004.

This audio clip includes the introduction and the beginning of *Swimming* from a December 12, 2001, performance at The Performance Garage.

TRANSCRIPT

I don't know if it's a wise idea, the reason I decided to try—um, let's see, this front row here is lit pretty strong. This is the way it is every night? Or did you add some lights? You got a light coming over from here. Right down on you guys. How's that feel? Did you like it? Ok, I'll play too. No, I know. Maybe [unintelligible].

The monologue that I'm usually doing at the time is my favorite, and I'm doing this one now. But this was done before. So, if I was going to revive a monologue, it would either be *Sex and Death at the Age of 14* or *Swimming to Cambodia*, which I'm trying to do here tonight.

The only thing that's kind of pushing through and hitting up against me is this, um—well, I went to Ireland to celebrate my 60th birthday, and on the day after the longest day, the 22nd day of June, we went to a restaurant, five of us adults. And coming home, it was dusk. It was about 10:15 at night, and I look up—I was in the back seat, and Kathie was driving—and I look up and see framed right in her window, is this looks like a little bakery van, out of a cartoon, coming at about 60 miles per hour straight for us.

We're stopped to make a right turn, and there is this enormous explosion where they hit the car, and we spun out. The engine came through into the cabin. I was on a road lying in a puddle of blood. Kathie was next to me saying that she was dying. I said, "I can't straighten my leg out."

And so they took us to this country hospital in the middle of dairy land. It was run by Pakistani doctors. I don't know what happened to the Irish doctors. They've all left. The entire crew was Pakistani, and they insisted that I, first of all, that I just stay there in the hospital for six weeks in this dormitory situation where there were five other, I guess, farmers that had just run into each other in their various—I mean, the man that hit me was a veterinarian's assistant. There was medicine all over the street, you know, cow medicine mixed with my blood.

These people in there were, it was, they didn't even have an orthopedic doctor. So they had to just leave my leg there. I'd dislocated my hip and broke part of my hip, fractured my hip, and I was in the worst pain. And they gave me this shot of morphine, and I woke up in the night, and I woke up in the middle of the night and thought I had died in the Civil War. I was on the battlefield, wounded actually, at Antietam, and all these other people around me groaning were corpses. You could hear the magpies outside, squawking, and oh my God, in the morning, in came people with toast and tea—there was a cross dresser working in the hospital. A guy with green fingernails, long green fingernails, this long, holding the toast going, "Toast! Toast! Anyone want toast?"

No, thank you. I'll pass on that.

Then the priest came through with the Eucharist, and I took that for the first—I was desperate.

Then a woman came through with a clipboard doing a survey. She wanted to know whether or not I wanted to vote for the hospital to go smoke-free.

And by noon, all the relatives arrived with blenders and started making daiquiris and hanging out. Cell phones going off left and right. Everyone had a cell phone. Suddenly Ireland's very prosperous. Cell phones going off. Oh boy.

It took about three days—by afternoon, they were showing races on television. Cars going 192 miles an hour. Tara Newman, who was in the back seat with me, one of the five adults who were in the car. She wasn't injured—no one was injured but me! She was saved by her Prada bag. It hit the ceiling. I got the fractured skull and the broken hip. So, somehow Kathie relentlessly called and called and called until she got me out of that hospital. She was in there for observation herself and got me to a hospital up in, 10 miles north of Dublin. And I was operated on by a very good Irish doctor, I was told. One of the few left. Dr. McElwane [sp?] put a titanium plate in my side to reinforce the acetabulum. So, if I'm still a little uncomfortable tonight, it's from that. I woke up the next day a little depressed, but I wanted to talk to them about it, but I didn't want to say that to them because I figured the Irish didn't know exactly what depression meant. So, I said I was feeling a little blue. Mr. Gray, he's feeling a little blue.

And they said, [in Irish accent] "Oh, Mr. Gray, I wouldn't be worrying about it. If you were an Irishman, you wouldn't be giving it a second thought." She said, "Should I take you to the spinal ward? There, you'll see people blue."

So, after the operation, the one treat I had was that opium-morphine drip. That thing, that cht cht. Every six minutes you press it, and you get a shot of morphine. And, you forget to press it again. It's just a bliss land. And I put on my—Kathie was there with the boys every afternoon, she'd come over and visit, but I was there alone with the morphine drip. And I couldn't play a game of Scrabble. I couldn't [unintelligible]. I put on my little Walkman, and it was the Grateful Dead. And I'd never been to a Dead concert, and I totally understood what the attraction was. The tightness of that music and the spokes, the colored spokes, coming out of that very tight ball. We will survive. A lighter shade of Gray.

And then coming down from that drip, I didn't watch television. I got out of the dormitory room finally and got a single room. I had to get away from the TV, you see, because it would start with *Judge Judy*, and then it would run all of the American shows through up to *Survivor*, which, by the way, was dubbed in Gaelic.

So, I did have a TV in there just in case, and the one thing that I enjoyed was *The Simpsons*. They do about, oh, maybe three of those in a row at night. And the boys would watch it with me, and ah God. Coming down from the morphine drip, I would have such a treat. Because that was the Simpsons episode—I'd never seen it before, I'd only heard about it—where Marge calls out and says—Homer's in the bathtub—calls offstage to Homer, "Homer! The Reynolds are here with two extra tickets to see Spalding Gray." And Homer goes, "I don't want to see that."

So here you are. And it goes:

Saturday. June 18, 1983. Hua Hin, Gulf of Siam.

It was the first day off in a very long time, and about 130 of us were trying to get a little rest and relaxation out by this pool at this very, this very modern hotel really, right on the Gulf of Siam. It looked kind of like a, oh, like a pleasure prison, I suppose. Like one of those prisons they're making nowadays that are private prisons. I