

AFTER THE BEEP

Written and Performed by Pamela Bethel

SYNOPSIS

Pamela introduces the audience to her cassette tapes from the answering machine she had from grades 9-12. She had her own phone line because her dad, a busy self-employed business owner, didn't want to share a phone line with her. She has recently discovered the tapes as an adult, now immersed in all things “grown up” - new partner, new home and now – new baby. She couldn't be further from adolescence...so why are these recordings so fascinating now?

Messages are played throughout the piece (with projected transcriptions), helping to spur recollection, fill in blanks and, in some cases, fact-check a few mis-memories.

Pamela reflects on why she even saved these recordings at all, admitting she's been “simultaneously saving and avoiding them for years”. The audience is made privy to a host of tales of teenhood, ranging from boyfriends to Blockbuster Video (in its 90s heyday) to a shady karaoke bar. And what narrative of middle class white girlhood would be complete without an episode of shoplifting? All the while she kept up appearances and academic achievement – pro tip: parents stay off your case about your school attendance when you bring home good grades.

It all comes to a head when this under-supervised over-achiever finds herself with a stress induced ulcer - “like any other 18 year old middle-aged woman”. Looking back at her perennial need to be Perfect Pam, present-day Pamela realizes she's been trying to do the same thing as an overwhelmed new mother. She's been trying to do it all and make it look easy, so nobody has to worry about her. She marvels at how similar these two states are, adolescence and postpartum. Both involve the disorientation and growing pains – figurative and literal – of entering a new identity and physical state. Ultimately, the visceral reminder of a previous transition is comforting during this new one and we're reminded that we're never really finished “growing up”.