

The Bucket List
by **Travis Barkefelt**

Characters

Elizabeth Harris - Mid to late 60's, an older woman who has never lost her zest for life. She's never let her age slow her down and she has no intention of stopping anytime soon. Loves her husband dearly.

George Harris - Mid to late 60's, an older man who has always been more cautious. While Elizabeth can be a little flighty, he tends to stay firmly on Earth. In this way they compliment each other. Loves his wife dearly.

Doctor Williams Williams - Middle age, doctor. Compassionate with his patients but likes to get right to the point.

All action occurs within a hospital room. Set can be extremely minimal with only basic furniture to set the scene.

Elizabeth is lying in the bed.

ELIZABETH

Dear, I'll be fine. It's just a sprained-

Elizabeth trails off mid sentence.

GEORGE

Sprained ankle?

ELIZABETH

Yes, sorry. Just a little tired after all today's excitement!

GEORGE

Lizzy, at our age it's never *just* a sprained ankle. What about your headaches?

ELIZABETH

Worry, worry, worry. It'll be fine, Georgie, and if not, I've got my bucket list all planned out.

GEORGE

Don't start talking like that!

ELIZABETH

Do you not?

GEORGE

I plan on at least another ten years before worrying about that-and so should you!

Doctor Williams enters.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Mrs. Harris, I came here to tell you-

ELIZABETH

Hello doctor. My name is Elizabeth -

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Yes, Mrs. Harris, we spoke earlier. Doctor Williams.

ELIZABETH

Oh, of course.

GEORGE

Excuse her doctor, she likes to joke around. You get used to it after 40 or so years.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

It's always good to have a sense of humor. Mrs. Harris, your ankle should be fine. At your age, it might take longer to heal, but since you live a pretty active life style I don't expect any complications. Just limit the activity for a few months. Is there anything else bothering you?

ELIZABETH

Besides my age...but I'm guessing you don't have any pills that would make me twenty five again.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

No, not yet. If that's all, you should be good to go home.

GEORGE

Liz.

ELIZABETH

It's fine, George.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

There *is* something else?

ELIZABETH

I'm sure it's nothing. I wouldn't want to waste any more of your time.

GEORGE

(More firmly)

Liz.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Trust me, you won't be wasting any of my time.

ELIZABETH

Recently, I've been getting these headaches.

The doctor seems concerned.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

When did this start?

ELIZABETH

A few months ago.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

And how frequently?

ELIZABETH

Every few weeks, just -

She looks to George, and then to Doctor Williams, both seem concerned. Elizabeth hesitates for a moment before saying more.

ELIZABETH

In the past couple of weeks, they've been every couple days, and they've been getting worse.

GEORGE

Liz! I thought you said-

ELIZABETH

George, I'm sorry. I didn't want to worry you.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

I see. Just as a precaution, I'd like to run a few tests. Rule out anything serious.

ELIZABETH

Doctor, are you sure it's a big deal?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Just a few scans, nothing invasive. Just for peace of mind.

GEORGE

Can never have too much of that.

ELIZABETH

I have a feeling neither of you are going to let me go until I agree.

She smiles at her husband.

ELIZABETH

Just so my Georgie here can get a good night's sleep.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Of course. This won't take long..

The lights dim, some music to indicate passage of time. Doctor Williams exits. When the lights return the two are speaking, Elizabeth is still in the bed. When Doctor Williams returns, George snaps to attention.

GEORGE

What is it doctor. My wife, she's going to be alright?

The doctor gives George a solemn look and then addresses Elizabeth.

Doctor Williams?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Mrs. Harris, there's no easy way to say this but - you have Alzheimer's.

ELIZABETH

Oh my God.

GEORGE

How? She's physically active, has a vibrant social life, she -

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

-has a family history of the disease. Both her mother *and* father.

GEORGE

But she, we both did everything right! She's only in her sixties!

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Unfortunately, there's only so much we understand currently. While yes, there are factors and things you can do to lower the risk, there's no sure fire way to prevent it, especially with a family history.

GEORGE

Then why don't I have it? My Dad got it! And his dad before him! Why is SHE sick and I'm not?!

George is distraught, seeming like he may cry.

GEORGE

Why her?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

I'm sorry.

ELIZABETH

Doctor Williams?

The doctor turns to face Elizabeth

ELIZABETH

How long do I have? How long before I start to forget?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

At this point, it's hard to say. Right now you'd be considered to be in the early stage, though if your lapses earlier are anything to go by, the memory loss may have already begun. Now optimistically, you could stay at that stage for months or even years, after which you would enter the middle stage where you-

ELIZABETH

will get progressively worse. And soon I won't remember who I am. And what about pessimistically, is there a chance this could go faster?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Again, I'm sorry.

A beat.

ELIZABETH

(Devastated)

What about my bucket list? I've been meaning to travel more, do more. I can still do that, can't I? It's not too late?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

With your ankle like it is...I wouldn't advise it.

There is a moment of somber silence in the room.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

I'll schedule you for a follow up in a few months, by then your ankle should be better. From there, we can assess how quickly the disease is progressing. If the progression is slow, you might still be able to tick off some of that list.

ELIZABETH

Thank you, Doctor - uh.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Williams.

ELIZABETH

Of course.

GEORGE

Come on Liz, let's go home.

The lights dim. A few seconds of music happens. After some time a voice is heard in the dark, it is the panicked voice of George:

GEORGE

Doctor Williams, it's Elizabeth, this morning she didn't recognize me!

The lights come up in the same hospital room. Elizabeth is in the bed. George and Doctor Williams are speaking away from the bed.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Mr. Harris, take a deep breath and tell me exactly what happened.

GEORGE

We were eating breakfast, like normal, and suddenly she stops and just - looks at me, And not the way you'd look at someone you knew, much less a long term partner, it was vacant, distant.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Anything else? Did she say anything?

GEORGE

She introduced herself.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

She -

GEORGE

She held out her hand and said, "Hi, my name is Elizabeth."

ELIZABETH

It was just a brief lapse!

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

It's a good thing you came in.

ELIZABETH

I'm not going to just sit here while you two babble on about me like I'm not here!

She starts to stand.

ELIZABETH

I'm going home!

GEORGE

Lizzie, what are you-?

ELIZABETH

Don't you "Lizzie" me. I'm not going to waste the time I have left rotting in a hospital.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Mrs. Harris, please. You're not feeling well, lie back down.

ELIZABETH

My ankle's better! I don't need to sit here and listen to you go on about how sick I am because I'm fine! I'm going to work on my bucket list, like I *should be doing!*

GEORGE

Liz, please listen to Doctor Williams, he's trying to help.

ELIZABETH

I don't want to be here! I'm going home!

George grabs her arm.

GEORGE

Liz please! You're not yourself, you forgot about me - about us.

ELIZABETH

(Angry)

It was just a little mistake dammit, can't people make mistakes? I'm going home!

She pulls her arms from George's grip. George is hurt, shocked. Suddenly Elizabeth calms down. She looks back at George, whose face is contorted in a pained expression, then at Doctor Williams who's expression is a picture of complete pity.

ELIZABETH

Oh my God!

She eases back into the bed.

ELIZABETH

I'm losing it, George. I-I-

George hugs her.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

My God.

GEORGE

What is it doctor?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Mood swings, aggressiveness, they are common symptoms but not usually this early.

ELIZABETH

What do you mean? George what is he saying?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

It's definitely a good thing you brought her in today, Mr. Harris.

(Addressing Elizabeth)

During the typical course of the disease, good and bad days are to be expected, even in the early stage, lapses like the one this morning aren't unheard of but-

Elizabeth turns her head away to cry, Doctor Williams turns his attention to George.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

An episode like what just occurred is more typical of mid stage Alzheimer's.

GEORGE

I thought you said that it could take up to a year before the disease progresses.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

It's not exceedingly common, but rapidly progressive cases do occur. I'm sorry.

GEORGE

How much longer?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

I don't want to make any definitive-

GEORGE

Doctor Williams please. If you have any estimates, I need to know.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
(Averting George's
gaze.)

Given the rate of symptom onset, comparing to similiar cases, less than a year. At this point, I'd recommend keeping her here, she'll have around the clock care in case there's any sudden changes or more episodes of disorientation.

Elizabeth continues to cry.

GEORGE
It's ok, Lizzie. I'm here. These people will help you.

ELIZABETH
I can't be helped. I'm going to die. I'm going to die not knowing who I am, who you are.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
Our goal from this point forward would be to ensure your comfort for the duration of the stay. We'll do everything we can.

ELIZABETH
I don't understand. Right now I feel fine, more or less, but just a second ago I- and this morning -

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
It's not unheard of for patients to go through good and bad episodes in the early stage and the beginning of the middle stage. That part is expected, it's mostly the speed of progression that has us concerned.

ELIZABETH
I get the feeling I won't be able to do my list, will I?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
No, you won't.

A beat.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
I'll give you two some time alone.

GEORGE
Thank you, Doctor Williams.

Doctor Williams exits.

GEORGE
I'm sorry, Liz.

ELIZABETH

Don't be sorry, it's not your fault. You didn't give me Alzheimer's. Once I'm dead I'll have to take it up with Heaven's complaint department. Maybe by the time they get back to me you'll be there too.

George smiles.

A beat.

GEORGE

I can complete your bucket list.

ELIZABETH

George don't be ridiculous. I love you, but you're not the adventurous type. There's things on there you would never-

GEORGE

For you, I would do anything.

ELIZABETH

George...

GEORGE

I know I haven't always been the best.

ELIZABETH

Like the time you stayed in the lodge during the ski trip?

GEORGE

Yes, and I'm -

ELIZABETH

Or the time you stayed on the boat while I was water skiing?

GEORGE

That too.

ELIZABETH

Or about when-

GEORGE

(Teasingly)

You have a good memory for someone with Alzheimer's.

ELIZABETH

Use it or lose it, they say.

(More serious)

Though I guess I lose it either way.

A beat.

GEORGE

Then how about we do these things together?

ELIZABETH

I appreciate the optimism, dear, but the doctor said I'm stuck here.

GEORGE

Symbolically, I mean.

ELIZABETH

Alright English professor, how do you mean?

GEORGE

I'll go through the list, see the sights, and then I'll figure out a way to bring the experiences to you, in this room.

ELIZABETH

I don't know how you're going to pull that off, but it's a sweet idea.

GEORGE

Wherever it might be, whatever it might be, I'll bring the world to you. I promise.

ELIZABETH

Good luck George.

GEORGE

Why do you say that?

ELIZABETH

The first item isn't a where, but a what.

GEORGE

And what might that be?

ELIZABETH

Skydiving.

Lights go black. Some music, lights come back on in the hospital room. There is a fan pointed at Elizabeth's bed. The two are laughing, talking. Elizabeth is looking at a photo.

ELIZABETH

I see you did it.

GEORGE

I'm just surprised my heart didn't give out.

ELIZABETH
(Indicating the fan)

What's that for?

GEORGE
If I turn it on the highest setting
(he does so)
And point it at your face
(he does so)
And you close your eyes...

Elizabeth does so.

GEORGE
Feel the air rushing past?

ELIZABETH
Like I'm flying. Describe it to me. The sights, the sounds,
everything,

GEORGE
Mostly just the plane engine and the wooshing of air as far
as sounds go. Sights, though - The day was perfectly clear.
Not a cloud in sight. You could see for miles.

ELIZABETH
I can see our house!

GEORGE
Sure...I could even see our house. From the moment I left
the plane it was terrifying, yet exhilarating. In all my
life, I've never felt anything like it.

ELIZABETH
Nothing at all?

GEORGE
You know how when you ride a rollercoaster, and the way it
feels when it goes down a steep hill?

ELIZABETH
It's been a few years, but I remember.

GEORGE
It's like that times a hundred.

ELIZABETH
Wow...

GEORGE
For the first minute or so, it doesn't even feel like your
moving, like your suspended in the air. Then the ground
(MORE)

GEORGE (cont'd)
comes rushing at you, only it doesn't feel like your
falling, it feels like the entire Earth is rising to you!

ELIZABETH
And then what?

GEORGE
Then the guy I was strapped to activated his chute.
(Turning the fan onto
a lower setting)
And we drifted down, like a feather in the wind.

ELIZABETH
I can picture it! Oh I see it so clearly. The sky, the
birds - were there birds?

GEORGE
Once we got low enough.

ELIZABETH
They're beautiful.

GEORGE
And after the ride of my life, I basically kissed the earth
upon landing.

He shuts off the fan. She opens her
eyes.

ELIZABETH
That was wonderful, Georgie.

A beat.

I'm starving, when's lunch?

GEORGE
Liz, you already ate. They took the food away just as I was
coming in.

ELIZABETH
Oh. Right. Well thank you George. I suddenly feel tired.

GEORGE
Are you alright?

ELIZABETH
Just all the excitement of our little adventure. And I
didn't sleep well last night. I think I'll just rest my eyes
for a bit.

She goes to sleep. Doctor Williams
enters.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
Mr. Harris, how are you?

GEORGE
I've been alright. How's she?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
Today's a good day.

GEORGE
She said she didn't sleep well last night.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
She woke up three separate times, completely disoriented. Unsure where she was, demanding to know what happened to you.

GEORGE
Oh God. I'm-

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
It's ok. We've actually been able to reassure her by reminding her that when you weren't here you were working on her list. Which reminds me, the next thing she would like to do is visit Aruba.

GEORGE
That's were her parents always used to take her as a girl.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
Ah, I see. She knew the place was significant, she just-

GEORGE
It's that bad, huh?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
I'm sorry.

A beat.

GEORGE
Doctor Williams?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
Yes?

GEORGE
Why do you know what's next on the list?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS
Because she told me.

GEORGE

Yes, but why?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

To keep things interesting.

George furrows his eyebrows in confusion.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

As I'm sure you know, there's no physical list.

GEORGE

I suppose I never thought of it.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

All in her head, which, to be frank is becoming an increasingly unreliable storage medium. So, one day during a checkup, she entrusted what she could remember to the staff here, with instructions to pass each item off to you, one at a time of course. "Keep him on his toes." she said.

George smiles.

GEORGE

She never liked things to be dull or straightforward. "Life should be an adventure," she would always say.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

I don't blame her for finding entertainment where she can get it.

GEORGE

Well, I'm off on my next mission. Hopefully, I'll at least get a nice tan.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Best of luck.

GEORGE

Thank you, Doctor Williams.

Scene fades, tropical music, scene comes back up in the hospital room. There is a conch shell and a small pail of sand and some flowers on a bed side table. Doctor Williams and George are speaking.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Just a warning, Mr. Harris, her condition has been somewhat unstable as of late, but she's been asking about you, so I won't keep you.

Doctor Williams begins to make his exit, before stopping and turning to George.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Although, I should add, the next place she'd like you to visit is the Carnegie Library in Oakland.

GEORGE

That's where we first met. She really wanted to go back there? To Pittsburgh?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

It seemed to be a place she considered important. Anyway, I'll be on my way.

Doctor Williams exits, George approaches the bed.

ELIZABETH

George, where have you been? You've been gone for a long time now.

GEORGE

I was in Aruba, Liz.

ELIZABETH

Aruba, why'd you want to go there? You hate the beach.

GEORGE

Actually, I went because you wanted to, but since your here, you couldn't go yourself.

ELIZABETH

Oh, that's nice, dear.

A beat.

ELIZABETH

Do you know where Marge has been? I figured she'd be in to visit me at some point.

GEORGE

Liz, Marge passed away in December.

ELIZABETH

Oh...right. You know it's been forever since you've last visited. Where have you been?

George is clearly troubled by her rapidly deteriorating state.

GEORGE

I went to visit Aruba, since that's where you visited as a young girl.

ELIZABETH

Oh Aruba. How was it? I know you don't like the beach.

GEORGE

It was beautiful. Warm temperatures, crystal clear waters, I even enjoyed my time on the beach. Here, I brought some flowers back.

He hands her the flowers, she sniffs them.

ELIZABETH

Oh Georgie these are lovely.

GEORGE

I also brought some sand, which was an adventure on it's own packing away for the plane, but, I figured you might want to touch the beach again. And one more thing...

He holds the conch shell up to her ear, giving the effect of hearing the ocean, and the pail of sand in front of her.

GEORGE

Close your eyes, and listen to the waves. Feel the sand.

ELIZABETH

It's just like I'm a little girl again. I can see my sister in her new red suit. I can feel the sun on my face.

Suddenly she starts crying. George sets the conch and pail down.

GEORGE

Lizzie, honey, what's wrong?

ELIZABETH

I don't want it to go away. I can feel it fading and I don't want to lose it. I don't want to lose everything, I don't want to lose you! I can't do it.

George embraces her.

GEORGE

Elizabeth, oh Elizabeth. You're not going to lose me. I'll be here everyday. When I'm not out with the bucket list, I'll be right here by your side.

ELIZABETH

But what about when I don't recognize you anymore?

GEORGE

When that happens I just hope I've been the type of man you can fall in love with all over again.

Lights fade. Music. Lights up again. Elizabeth is not in her bed. George has a book with him. George searches around frantically.

GEORGE

Liz! Elizabeth! Doctor Williams! Doctor Williams, my wife is missing!

The doctor enters with Elizabeth.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Mr. Harris, I'm sorry to startle you. Your wife has started wandering. Found her in the cafe today.

ELIZABETH

(To the doctor)

Who are you? Get your hands off of me!

She notices George and goes to him.

ELIZABETH

Georgie! What's this all about? Where are we? I'm frightened.

GEORGE

Calm down, dear. I'm here. You haven't been feeling well, so you need to rest alright?

ELIZABETH

I don't understand. Why are we here?

GEORGE

Like I said, dear, you've been feeling a little under the weather. I brought something.

George shows her the book. It is a copy of Ibsen's "A Doll's House"

GEORGE

Do you remember this?

ELIZABETH

I...can't say I do.

GEORGE

I'm sure you'll love it. I knew someone back in college, we met when we both reached for this on the shelf.

ELIZABETH

(Increasingly
distressed)

That sounds...familiar. But I can't place it. I don't understand what's-

GEORGE

Don't worry too much about it, dear. What's important now is that you rest.

ELIZABETH

Right. Rest. I just need some rest and I'll be feeling better. Have you seen Marge recently?

GEORGE

No dear, she's de-she's been busy. I'll give her word to visit when she gets the chance.

ELIZABETH

Hopefully I'm out before Thursday.

GEORGE

Why Thursday?

ELIZABETH

We have our bridge game Thursday, don't you remember?

GEORGE

Ah, must of slipped my mind.

ELIZABETH

George.

GEORGE

Yes, dear.

ELIZABETH

Would you mind reading that book you got? I feel like I'll enjoy it.

GEORGE

Of course. I'll do my best to give each character a distinct voice.

(Reading the play)

Act 1. Scene: A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back...

The lights fade as he reads. They come back up in the room. A folding

table has been set up with a table cloth, a bottle of wine and a few wine glasses. In the center of the table is a candlestick.

GEORGE

I'm not going to lie Doctor, this hospital room is somewhat lacking in the ambience of that restaurant.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

You did nice.

GEORGE

Was the last item on her bucket list really recreating our first date?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

No.

GEORGE

What?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

Everything after the skydiving wasn't on her list.

GEORGE

What? Why would you-

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

It wasn't on her *original* list.

GEORGE

Original?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

When she was... more lucid, she gave us two lists. One with skydiving and mountain climbing and trying puffer fish, and one with all the things you've been doing.

GEORGE

But why?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

In case she started to forget.

GEORGE

I still don't understand.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

We didn't ask for more explanation. It wasn't our place. But if I had to guess, for closure. For both of you.

GEORGE

For both of us?

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

There were nights where she'd babble. Sometimes coherent, sometimes not so much, but often she'd mention you. Positive things, mind you, but it seemed to us you made her happy, and she felt the best thing she could do was allow the both of you to relive happy memories.

GEORGE

But I was never with her in Aruba, those were family trips from her childhood.

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

That one was on both lists, actually. She wanted to relive a happy childhood memory *and* wanted you to be part of it, it seems.

GEORGE

God, I don't know what to say, she really did all of this...

DOCTOR WILLIAMS

She's a special woman. Now, I'll leave you two to your date.

Doctor Williams leaves. George approaches the bed.

GEORGE

Hi there Liz.

Elizabeth lights up when seeing George, though its clear she's no longer all there.

ELIZABETH

Hello!

GEORGE

Ready for our date?

ELIZABETH

But I have nothing to wear!

GEORGE

You're perfect just as you are. Don't worry, it's not far.

George takes her hand and helps her stand, leading her to the table. They are both seated.

GEORGE

All these years later and you are jut as beautiful as the day we met.

ELIZABETH

Why sir, you're not too bad looking yourself.

George pops the cork on the wine bottle.

GEORGE

The doctor said I couldn't bring outside food, but he didn't say anything about a couple of drinks.

He pours some wine in each glass and hands one to her.

GEORGE

Cheers!

Elizabeth giggles like she has a schoolyard crush.

ELIZABETH

Cheers!

GEORGE

How have you been?

ELIZABETH

I'm on a very nice date with a very nice gentleman, so I can't complain. What about you?

GEORGE

Well, I've had an interesting few months.

ELIZABETH

Oh?

GEORGE

I went skydiving.

ELIZABETH

Weren't you scared?

GEORGE

Yes, but it meant a lot to someone very special, so it was worth it.

ELIZABETH

I've always wanted to go skydiving. See the world from up high like that!

George gets a little choked up.

GEORGE

I've also been traveling. I went to Aruba recently.

ELIZABETH

My family goes there every year. It's really beautiful isn't it?

GEORGE

It's really something. Do you like Ibsen?

ELIZABETH

He's my favorite playwright.

GEORGE

Funny. Mine too.

ELIZABETH

What a coincidence!

GEORGE

Care to dance?

ELIZABETH

But there's no music.

George takes out his phone and plays a slow oldies love song. The two do a slow dance to the music for a short while. They dance around the stage as if by magic they've regained their youth. Once they return to the bed, Elizabeth speaks up.

ELIZABETH

I'm terribly sorry, but suddenly I feel exhausted.

GEORGE

Shall I walk you home?

ELIZABETH

Thank you.

George leads her back to the bed and helps her in.

ELIZABETH

Thank you! This has been magical.

The two kiss.

ELIZABETH

Look at me sharing a kiss and yet I don't even know your name.

GEORGE

The name is George. George Harris.
(Sadly)
But I should be going.

ELIZABETH

Oh, but you'll be back, won't you?

George smiles sadly.

GEORGE

Yes. I'll be back. I'll be back very soon.

ELIZABETH

Good night

(She hesitates)

GEORGE

George.

ELIZABETH

Good night Georgie!

GEORGE

Goodnight Lizzie.

He exits. Lights fade.

End of play.