

TRINITY GUILDHALL

Chatroom

JIM: I'm six years old and my three brothers are going away with my mother for the weekend ... a treat for something or other. My dad's staying behind and my mother says that he's to look after me. That it would be a chance for us to bond. So they're gone and me and my dad are sat at the kitchen table looking at each other. Like we're looking at each other for the first time, you know. He asks me what I want to do, and straight away I say I want to go and see the penguins in the zoo. When I was six I was going through some mad penguin obsession. I used to dress up as a penguin at dinner times and always ask for fish fingers ... stuff like that. If it wasn't penguins it was cowboys. Cowboys were cool. A penguin dressed as a cowboy was always a step too far, funnily enough!

EVA: [*groans to herself*] Oh God.

JIM: So we go to the zoo and I wear my cowboy outfit ... get my gun and holster, my hat and all that. We get the bus and it's sort of funny to see my dad on the bus and away from the house. We start to have this chat about when I was born and what a really fat baby I was ... but how after a day or so I stopped eating any food and everyone was dead worried. That *he* was very worried. That he was so happy when I got better and they could take me home. [*Slight pause*] We're in the zoo, and I go straight to the penguins. Standing in my cowboy gear ... looking at the penguins ... having such a great chat to my dad on the bus ... it was a perfect childhood day. [*Slight pause*] He lets go of my hand and says he'll be back with my choc-ice. And he goes. [*Pause*] He's gone. [*Pause*] I'm happy looking at the penguins, but it's an hour since he's left and I go to look for him. I'm walkin' about the zoo, and I'm not worried yet. And I don't talk to anyone. I leave the zoo and I go to the bus stop we got off at earlier. I get on the bus. I tell the driver my address. He asks where my parents are and I say they're at home waiting for me. I stay on the bus in the seat nearest the driver. After a while we end up at the end of our street and the driver says, 'So long, cowboy.' [*Laughs a little*] He was nice. [*Pause*] I get the key from under the mat and open the door and go inside the house. And I'm alone there and I suppose I still think my dad will be coming back soon. I take off my cowboy clothes and hang up my hat and holster. It being Saturday night I have a bath and get into my pyjamas because my dad would have liked that. I have a glass of milk and some biscuits and watch *Stars in Their Eyes* 'cause that was his favourite programme on the telly. [*Slight pause*] It's getting dark outside and I start to worry. The house is feeling too big so I get my quilt and take it into the bathroom and lock the bathroom door and it feels safer with the door locked so I stay in there. And he's not coming back. [*Pause*] He's never coming back. [*Pause*] I stay there for two days.

Enda Walsh

In this extract JIM recalls a trip to the Zoo with his Dad when he was six years old.

'Chatroom' was written for the National Theatre of Great Britain's 'Connections' project that commissions experienced dramatists to write plays that can be performed by young people. As the title suggests the play is about six 15 year olds meeting in cyber space.

Enda Walsh (born 1967) is an Irish playwright born in Dublin who attended the same secondary school where novelist Roddy Doyle taught.

Other plays by Enda Walsh include 'Disco Pigs', 'The Walworth Farce', and a translation of a Brecht short play 'How Much is your Iron?'

*There are several volumes of plays for young people published under the title 'New Connections'. For further information visit:
www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/bookshop*