

THE **CENTER** OF THE UNIVERSE



**TEENS
ON
TOUR**

REAL TEENS. REAL STORIES. REAL IMPACT.

THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

Callback Packet #1

MARIA AND CRAIG

CRAIG: ...And what percentage of both houses of Congress is necessary to override a presidential veto?

MARIA: Two-thirds.

CRAIG: And so what is a veto-proof congress?

MARIA: When the President's opposite party has at least two-thirds in both the Senate and the House. Theoretically, any bills they pass should be able to withstand any presidential veto.

CRAIG: Good.

MARIA: Oh, this is hideous.

CRAIG: Better than the stuff you'll get in law school.

MARIA: I'm not going to law school. You're going to law school. I'm going to medical school.

CRAIG: Right.

MARIA: And which one of us is going to work, while I'm in medical school and you're in law school?

CRAIG: Neither one, we'll move in with your parents...they'll support us.

MARIA: Seriously Craig, how are we going to live while we're both going to graduate school?

CRAIG: We've already talked about this.

MARIA: And we haven't reached any conclusions.

CRAIG: I thought we decided that we could both work part-time.

MARIA: It'll be tough.

CRAIG: But temporary. Do you realize how much money we'll be making when I'm practicing law and you're a doctor?

MARIA: And do you realize how long that will take?

CRAIG: I'll be out of school two or three years before you. I think we can live on a lawyer's income for a little while.

MARIA: Very funny.

THEY BOTH SMILE. THERE IS A PAUSE IN THE CONVERSATION.

CRAIG: You know what else was funny? Your father's face...

(OVERLAPPING)

MARIA: What?

CRAIG: ...when I was talking to him about the river.

MARIA: You didn't tell him about the river!

CRAIG: I didn't realize that you hadn't mentioned it to him.

MARIA: Or my mother. Oh, man, what did you tell him?

CRAIG: What do you mean, "what did I tell him"? *(JOKINGLY)* I told him we were going for a weekend-long make-out session...

MARIA:what?

CRAIG: Except for a quick break after your bikini contest...

MARIA: WHAT!?!

CRAIG: I didn't say that. But he will want to talk to you about this later on.

MARIA: I should have told them.

CRAIG: I know.

MARIA: Weeks ago.

CRAIG: I know.

MARIA: But they won't stop me from going.

CRAIG: I know.

MARIA: How do you know?

CRAIG: I don't. I was just trying to be agreeable.

MARIA: Really. They won't. I mean—they wouldn't. They couldn't. I'll be eighteen in a few weeks, and they have to let me make a few of my own decisions.

CRAIG: They already do.

MARIA: And about more important things than going to the river for a few days.

CRAIG: Yeah, like where you're going to school, what you're going to be when you grow up...

MARIA: And...you.

CRAIG: ...And...me. Me?

MARIA: You.

CRAIG: I'm a decision.

MARIA: Sure. It goes something like this: Where do you want to go to college? M.I.T. What do you want to be when you're a professional? A doctor. Who do you want to live the rest of your life with? (*PAUSE*)

CRAIG: Maria? (*MARIA IS STILL THINKING*) Maria?

MARIA: I'm pausing because I couldn't decide between you and Martin Zorberg.

CRAIG: Martin Zorberg? That little guy with the funky hair and the eyes that changed colors?

MARIA: (*MOCK SERIOUSNESS*) Yes.

CRAIG: That's not funny, you know.

MARIA: (*GOES AND SITS NEXT TO HIM*) I chose you, though.

CRAIG: Thanks. A tough one.

MARIA: It *was* a tough one. Did I ever show you our picture from my sophomore Winter Formal?

CRAIG: Yes that's where I noticed the hair.

MARIA: He didn't look that bad in person. I hardly noticed in the dim lighting at the dance, and if you squinted your eyes a certain way, he kind of looked like Ryan Gosling.

CRAIG: What ever happened to..."Ryan"?

MARIA: He transferred to a private school.

CRAIG: Too bad.

MARIA: Too bad.

CRAIG: But you chose me. He'll probably wind up being a nuclear scientist who'll win a Nobel Prize, but you chose me.

MARIA: Tough choice.

CRAIG: But you're glad you made it.

MARIA: I am?

CRAIG: Aren't you?

MARIA: I am.

CRAIG: So am I...

(THEY MAKE A MOTION TO KISS BUT ARE INTERRUPTED BY MOTHER'S VOICE OFF-STAGE.)

MOTHER (O.S.): Maria?

MARIA: Yes, mom?

MOTHER (O.S.): Would you and Craig like a sandwich?

MARIA: No, mom!

CRAIG: *(KIDDING)* How do you know I wouldn't like a sandwich?

MARIA: Because I...would you?

CRAIG: No.

MOTHER (O.S.): Would you like a sandwich, Craig?

CRAIG: No, Mrs. Alfari. Thank you.

MOTHER (O.S.): What are you... are you studying up there?

(THEY SEQUESTER THEIR LAUGHTER)

MARIA: Yes, Mom. Government.

MOTHER (O.S.): Okay, well, let me know if you'd like something to eat later.

MARIA: Okay!

CRAIG: (*PAUSE*) I don't think she likes us up here alone.

MARIA: I know she doesn't. But we've already discussed that issue. She has to trust me.

CRAIG: I'd trust you.

MARIA: And I'd trust you.

CRAIG: Good, in that case: Would you like to go the river with me after you graduate high school next week?

MARIA: (*MOCK HORROR*) Alone? (*LAUGHING*) I'll have to ask my father. Do your parents know yet?

CRAIG: I'll ask'em.

MARIA: You mean they don't know either?

CRAIG: No problem, I'm a boy.

MARIA: I know your father, Craig; he's like Mike Brady.

CRAIG: Mike Brady would have let any of the "bunch" spend an entire week at the river with their girlfriend. He would have encouraged it. My father just hasn't thought of it yet. He'll think it's a great idea.

MARIA: Sure he will.

CRAIG: He will.

MARIA: Sure.

CRAIG: I'll let him think it's his idea.

MARIA: Right. And what's this about a bikini contest?

CRAIG: I wouldn't let you enter a bikini contest.

MARIA: You wouldn't *let* me?

CRAIG: I mean, I would strongly advocate in the negative.

MARIA: Well, I just might enter.

CRAIG: I'll tell your father.

MARIA: You already have.

CRAIG: No, I wanted to.

MARIA: I'll bring him pictures. I'll give *you* pictures.

CRAIG: And I'll show them to our children.

MARIA: I'd be proud.

CRAIG: Want to kiss me?

MARIA: No.

CRAIG: Want to study?

MARIA: Yes.

CRAIG: I thought you'd say that.

MARIA: That's what my parents think that we're doing.

CRAIG: *We are.*

MARIA: (*KISSES HIM QUICKLY ON THE CHEEK*) *We are.*

CRAIG: Go over there. (*POINTS TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM*)

MARIA: Aw.

CRAIG: Be a good girl.

MARIA: (*POUTING*) Aww... But...

CRAIG: You wouldn't kiss me.

MARIA: I did.

CRAIG: You call *that* a...? Never mind. Okay. In which amendment is there protection against invasion of privacy?

MARIA: (*DISTANTLY*) The fourth.

CRAIG: Explain.

(MARIA IS SILENT)

CRAIG: Maria? Explain how this amendment protects privacy.

MARIA: *(GETTING UP AND SPEAKING, WHILE SHE PLAYFULLY GOES TO HIM; HE SMILES AND EXTENDS HIS ARMS TO HER, AS THE TWO EXIT)* Well, the original interpretation came from the protections against search and seizure, but the more modern supreme court interpretations have extended this to a person's personal possessions, or even his own...body...

.

MARIA AND MOTHER

MOTHER: I don't think your father will like the idea of you having a job before you go off to college.

MARIA: It's just for the summer. In fact, not even the whole summer. Just until the middle of August. I can earn some extra money. I need to buy some clothes.

MOTHER: Just ask your father for the money.

MARIA: I did. He says he doesn't have any.

MOTHER: But a two-month job, Maria. You should be taking a rest.

MARIA: It's in a movie theatre. That's a fun place to work.

MOTHER: We'll ask him when he gets home. What time is Craig coming over?

MARIA: He'll be here in a half-hour.

MOTHER: And where are you going.

MARIA: Just to my room. *(PAUSE)* He rented a movie.

(MOTHER JUST LOOKS AT MARIA WITHOUT SAYING A WORD)

MARIA: It's no big deal mom.

MOTHER: You know how much your father and I don't like you and Craig in there by yourselves.

MARIA: I know.

MOTHER: What's the movie? Maybe we can all watch it together in the den.

MARIA: Mom...

MOTHER: Not a good idea, huh?

MARIA: Listen, I'm going over to the mini-mart to get some Coke's and popcorn or something. You want anything?

MOTHER: Get a bag of chips, we're out.

MARIA: We're out of everything; that's why I'm going.

MOM: Here, I'll get you some money (*GETS PURSE*)

MARIA: I may be broke, but I think I can afford to get my Mom a bag of chips.

MOTHER: And how are you getting there?

MARIA: (*HOPING FOR THE KEYS*) Driving? (*STICKS HER HAND OUT*)

MOTHER: (*MOTHER HANDS MARIA THE CAR KEYS*) Be careful.

MARIA: I'm a high school graduate now, Mom. I know how to drive, and I know how to be careful. (*DELIBERATE, SURREALISTIC MONOTONE*) I'm a high school graduate now, Mom. I know how to be careful.

CRAIG AND MOTHER

MOTHER: Look at this one. And I love this one...

CRAIG: How old was she here?

MOTHER: About a year and a half. She's going to kill me for showing you these.

CRAIG: She should have let me see them before.

MOTHER: Do you have a baby album of yourself at home?

CRAIG: Sure.

MOTHER: And has Maria seen it?

CRAIG: Of course...not.

MOTHER: There you go. (*LAUGHING*) (*POINTING TO ANOTHER PICTURE*) I love this one. She was just three years old here; it was her birthday. Just before Mr. Alfari snapped this picture, she whispered, "I love you, Mommy." I mean, I wanted to cry. It was the first time Maria ever said that to me, unprompted I mean. I would say to her sometimes: "Mommy loves Maria. Does Maria love Mommy? And Maria would say, "I love you, Mommy." But here, just before her father took this picture, Maria said it: "I love you, Mommy." Just like that.

CRAIG: We're lucky to have her.

MOTHER: Yes, we are Craig. I used to worry quite a bit about who the lucky young man was going to be...Maria's all we have. And I tell you, despite my reservations about a four-year engagement at the tender age of seventeen, or eighteen, I'm quite happy with her choice. I'm very happy, and so is Mr. Alfari.

CRAIG: I don't know what to...Thank you. Really. Thank you.

MOTHER: Was Maria renting the movie or you?

CRAIG: No, I have it. Why?

MOTHER: She's just taking a long time getting a bag of chips...

CRAIG: Did she walk?

MOTHER: No, she drove.

CRAIG: Maybe she stopped somewhere else.

MOTHER: Probably. You know how she is. She says she's going to pick up a few things and winds up thinking of a dozen other items she needs.

CRAIG: Yeah that's for sure. Aren't all women like that? Yeah, well, she should be back in a minute or so. I don't think she'd let me look through this album if she were here anyway. Let's hurry.

MOTHER: This one is of her at her fifth birthday party. We hired this clown...

MRS. KOMINSKY AND NAZI

MRS: We had heard some things about the camps, but did not know the truth until November of 1940, when the police came to our home in the middle of the night and pulled us from the warmth of our beds. My husband and my little son and my three teen-age daughters: there was so much crying and confusion...It was the final moment that I will never forget. That moment when I would lay my eyes upon my husband and son for the very last time... The Nazi police were taking my daughters and me one way, and the trains were taking the men another. Yes, I had heard some things about the camps; but the bleak cold and the smell of death, one could never properly prepare for. They tell us now that the women's camps were not as harsh, that death came more swiftly and less painfully; that the rigors of working in the freezing cold in bare feet and sleeping in cockroach and lice infested barracks were less pronounced. Maybe that is true, but the endless hours of living would have been gladly exchanged for a quick and merciful death. And many of us were obliged.

NAZI: You will be spared, Mrs. Kominsky; for your strength is a valuable asset. But your daughters... We will allow one of them to live.

MRS: But I have three daughters!

NAZI: We only need one; they are practically of the same age and size, so you choose.

MRS: You are asking me to choose one of my own flesh and blood? You are asking me to select a survivor?

NAZI: It is a very generous choice.

MRS: You swine!

NAZI: It is not that bad, Mrs. Kominsky. We will simply tell them they are about to have the luxury of a shower. They could use a nice shower after all these weeks, no?

MRS: I cannot make such a decision!

NAZI: Then we will take all three.

MRS: No!

NAZI: Then you choose.

MRS: My God! If there *is* a God, He must be able to hear my prayers! I am begging you, God! I have already lost my husband and son! Please, not my daughters! Please!

NAZI: Mrs. Kominsky, if there is a God, why would He answer only your prayers and not the prayers of millions of others? What makes you such a special Jew?

KKK AND CONSCIENCE

KLAN: Only real Americans, those bred of White, European blood—pure European blood—are deserving of the liberties and freedoms that our Christian God has bestowed upon this land! The blacks and the Jews, the Mexicans, and other Spics from south of the border, should all go back to where they came from—or face the wrath of the White race that has finally risen to take back that which is rightfully theirs!

CON: You are disgusting. Truly repugnant.

KLAN: I don't think I know you...

CON: Of course you don't. I am the human conscience. You have never known me.

KLAN: The human conscience only distorts my ideas.

CON: I have given up trying to get inside your mind. I can only sigh with relief that you are in such a minority and no longer represent the thinking of very many people.

KLAN: I might surprise you.

CON: No. Those who contend that you are in abundance in America are liars. For every one of you, there are thousands that loathe you and what you stand for. The conscience that cannot be a part of you finds that you would be almost comical—as you stand there in that idiotic robe with that stupid-looking hood—if you were not so despicable in what you represent.

KLAN: I will have the last laugh. You bleeding heart! I hate the human conscience! Those who do not share the belief that the purity of the White race shall inherit the earth will burn in the fires of hell with the blacks, the dirty Jews and all of the others who do not belong here!

NAZI AND CONSCIENCE

CON: When Allied soldiers liberated the death camps at the end of the war, among the hundreds of thousands of corpses and the millions of human bones, they found empty bottles of liquor and beer. For what did it take to be able to lead women and children to the gas chambers, to empty a machine gun on a mother holding her tiny child in her arms, to toss thousands of lifeless bodies into enormous ovens, attempting to elude the stench of burned human flesh? For those who could not see the Jews or the Gypsies or the infirm or the aged as less than really human, there was the need to get drunk, to numb the mind. For one human being to be so cruel and unjust to another there was this imperative: They must be less than human. They are not real people, as we are!

NAZI: They were not real people as we were!

CON: They were human beings!

NAZI: They were Jews! They were not part of the master plan! And the others: they would make the plan a failure! So, they had to be exterminated.

CON: They were not real people?

NAZI: No! They were blights on the face of success!

CON: You could not see them as people?

NAZI: No!

CON: Then why the need for alcohol? Why the need for so many commandants and soldiers in the camp to deaden their senses, as they performed their “work?”

NAZI: For some, it was a necessity. For others: we could see the chore that we had to do and then we carried it out, like any other chore.

CON: Like any other chore...And so, for many, the Holocaust, the mass genocide of over twelve million human beings, became the first conclusive evidence that for one human being to treat another human being with such degradation and cruelty, the victims could not be seen as real living, breathing...people. People with lives, loves, and hopes...

CONSCIENCE, ANTI-CONSCIENCE, MARIA, MR. SOCIETY, MRS. SOCIETY

CON: Like the slave owners; like the members of hate groups who practice racism today; like the Nazis over seventy years ago: for some, human life is cheap. There is no value to human life for them. And so, even with the promise of a young woman like Maria, a single act of malice, an unthinking, uncaring, almost casual act of senselessness by a stranger, and the world is further diminished of it's wealth and beauty. She was, simply, in the wrong place at the wrong time.

ANTI: Yes, and how do we mourn this loss? How does most of society, uh, deflate?

(MR. AND MRS. SOCIETY ARE ON STAGE AT THE DINNER TABLE)

MR. S: Gee, dear, this is one good dinner! Yum-yum!

MRS. S: Well, thank you, honey.

MR. S: You're welcome sweetheart.

MRS. S: I'm glad that you welcome my thank you to your compliment about my dinner, teddy-bear.

MR. S: Anytime, my cutie-pie. *(READING SOMETHING IN NEWSPAPER)* Oh, sweetie!

MRS. S: What is it, nookynooks?

MR. S: I'm reading in the paper here about something awful that happened the other night. Simply terrible. Pass the potatoes please.

MRS. S: What is it, hunky?

MR. S: Horrible, my love. A young girl was shot and killed during a liquor store robbery right here in town. Hand me that bowl of gravy, my pottie-poodle.

MRS. S: That is very sad, my dimpled prince.

MR. S: Such a waste of human resources. And so young. Are we having apple pie for dessert?

MRS. S: Yes we are, lovey-dovey. Do you want to go to the movies tonight?

MR. S: Sure honey, let's go.

ANTI: Do you know how many teens there are in the United States? Millions. So, what's a few less teens? Who's going to miss them?

MARIA: I'm a person. I am not a number. I'm a human being. I am not a statistic.

CON: Every human being on the face of the earth: if you cut them, will they not bleed? If you break their heart, will they not cry? If you take their loved one from them, will they not drown in a sea of sorrow? The key: knowing that.

ANTI: Well, the fact is...in the total scheme of things, you're really very insignificant. When you think about all of the people who have lived here since the beginning of time, what difference can you make anyway? When you think about all of the people who live here now, what difference will you make anyway?

CON: If all human beings were conscious that other human beings were just like they are, with plans and hopes and dreams, with mothers and fathers and grandparents, with fears and passions and pains, with joys and sorrows and regrets, with notions and beliefs and souls... If all human beings only understood that just as they are the center of the universe, with all revolving around them, so are others the center of *their* universe with all revolving around *them*... the callousness, the inhumanity, the thoughtlessness, and even the cruelty, would vanish.

MARIA: I'm a person! I feel, and I love and I dream and I cry. I am something! I mean something!

ANTI: Yeah, well, too bad... You're gone.

MARIA: Mom? Dad? I remember what you used to tell me. All the time you use to tell me that life is not very fair. That you have to accept the bitter with the sweet and you should understand that you don't always have control over what comes your way. I was always so careful, mom. I did almost everything you told me to do. And Craig, I am sorry Craig. I loved you so much...I love you. And I knew about the unfairness of life, but...to have my life ended because I wanted to buy some chips and a coke...Now, that is the ultimate in unfair...and that guy with the gun...why was he so cruel? He didn't know me...he certainly didn't know how much I wanted to live...and all that I had to live for... The universe that was mine...no longer with it's center...and yet it continues to revolve...without me.

BASHER AND RON

BASHER: Hey!

BASHER: Nice hair.

RON: Thanks.

BASHER: You comb it yourself?

BASHER: It's pretty, like a princess.

BASHER: Where's your tiara?

RON: Can I help you guys with something?

BASHER: What are you doing here, queer??

RON: Standing.

BASHER: We can see that.

RON: Like you, I'm admiring the sunset.

BASHER: The what?

RON: The view.

BASHER: Well, I don't like what I see.

BASHER: This area isn't for homos.

BASHER: So take your view, and move on, if you know what's best.

BASHER: Hey....let's get out of here. Just, leave him alone

BASHER: Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize he was your girlfriend.

BASHER: So what's it going to be, gay-boy?

(THE BASHERS FREEZE, RON SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE)

RON: Ya know, these guys... They don't know me. They have no idea what I am. And even if I...Look, number one: I have the right to walk on this beach, any time, day or night, no matter what so-called part of town I happen to be in. Number two: These morons wouldn't know a gay person if they had it written on their shirt. And number three: It doesn't even matter if I'm gay or

not. I'm not bothering this coward. It kind of makes me sick to think that people feel the need to run around town looking for people to smash with a baseball bat. All of the problems in the world right now, and *this* is what angers them...A bit of a tragedy don't you think?

BASHER: Are you deaf too?

BASHER: We said this area isn't for you.

BASHER: You are gay aren't you...

RON: That's none of your business.

BASHER: (*PUSHING RON*) Well we're making it our business.

BASHER: We've been looking all night.

BASHER: And I think you're the winner... Congratulations!

BASHER: You're going to be real sorry that you showed your face on this beach.

RON: You have no idea what I am.

BASHER: Here's what I think you are!