



RESOURCE GUIDE

# THE RUNNER

BY  
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For more info visit  
[www.tarragontheatre.com](http://www.tarragontheatre.com)

Photo Featuring Gord Rand  
by Lyon Smith

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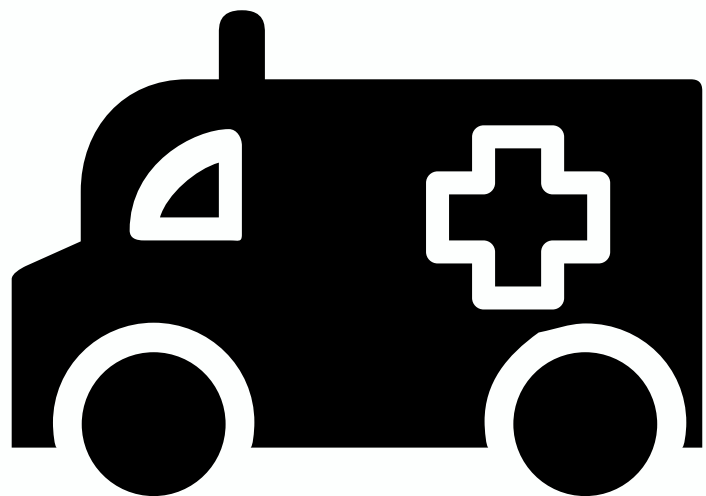
# ABOUT THE PLAY

## SYNOPSIS

**“That’s all that matters. Kindness. An act of kindness.”**

**Z.A.K.A is an Orthodox Jewish volunteer force in Israel. They collect the remains of Jews killed in accidents. When Jacob, a Z.A.K.A volunteer, makes the split-second decision to treat a young woman, instead of the soldier she may have killed, his world is changed forever.**

**A powerful thriller from Toronto’s Human Cargo and winner of the 2019 Dora Mavor Moore Awards for Outstanding Production, Outstanding Direction and Outstanding New Play.**



## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

For Tarragon: Debut



Selected Credits: *The Runner* (Human Cargo, Theatre Passe Muraille); *Our Beautiful Sons* (Blyth Festival - 2014 Playwright in Residence); *The Road to Paradise* (co-playwright with Jonathan Garfinkel - Human Cargo, Crow's Theatre, Buddies in Bad Times and tour to the Aga Khan Museum and CFB Petawawa); *Night* (commissioned by Human Cargo and premiered at the National Arts Centre, toured nationally and internationally); *Return: The Sarajevo Project* (co-playwright Theatrefront).

Upcoming: *The Runner* tours to Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre (April/2021), Thousand Islands Playhouse (September/2020), Green Light Arts (November/2020), Talk is Free Theatre (November/2020).

In development: *Le Jardin d'os*, *Annie Pootoogook: Portrait of an Artist*.

Awards: Dora Award for *The Runner*, 2012 Canada Council John Hirsh Prize for Directing, 2005 KM Hunter Award for Theatre, Dora nomination for *Return: The Sarajevo Project*.

Other: Christopher is an actor, director and the Artistic Director of Human Cargo.

## PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE

I want to create theatre that explores the extremes of the human condition. I'm interested in what happens to us when we are pushed to our spiritual, moral and emotional limits because it's at these times that we see the best, and worst, of who we are.

*The Runner* focuses on the pushback a Z.A.K.A. member experiences when his devotion to serve others – regardless of their race or creed – clashes with the divisive beliefs of the community around him. As we slide further down the path of political and social division, now more than ever, we need to champion those who put human decency above tribalism, while knowing full well the consequences they'll face.

This play is dedicated to Jakoff Mueller, a Z.A.K.A. member in Israel who passed away in February 2018. He first welcomed me into his home in 2010 and over the years we spent many hours talking about the experiences he had working with Z.A.K.A., from the harrowing to the profound. He was my beacon of light as I navigated the murky currents of this play. Jakoff was a beautiful soul, full of compassion and self-deprecating humor.

While passing away from cancer, he was surrounded by his loving family and friends, and in death, was shown the same tenderness and care he offered to so many.

With love, Jakoff, thank you.

# What Is ZAKA ?



**1**  [Click here](#)

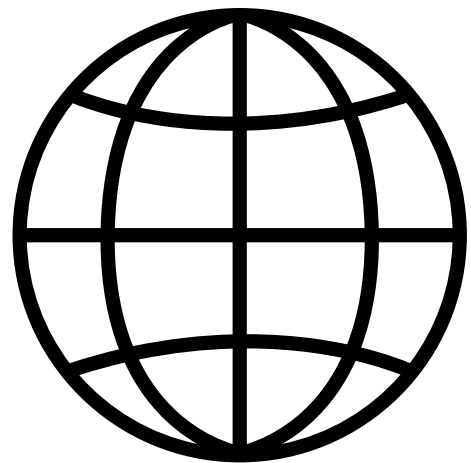
## **Collecting Dead Bodies in Israel for Burial: Z.A.K.A.**

A VICE documentary that follows Z.A.K.A. volunteer Eliezer Summit. An introduction to the work of Z.A.K.A. and the people behind it.

**2**

## **Z.A.K.A.'s Official Website**

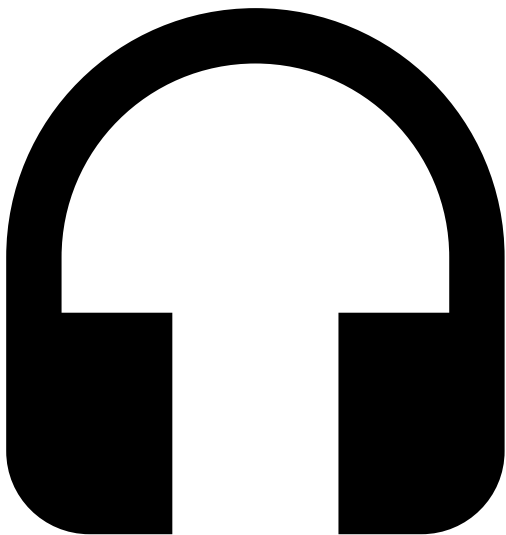
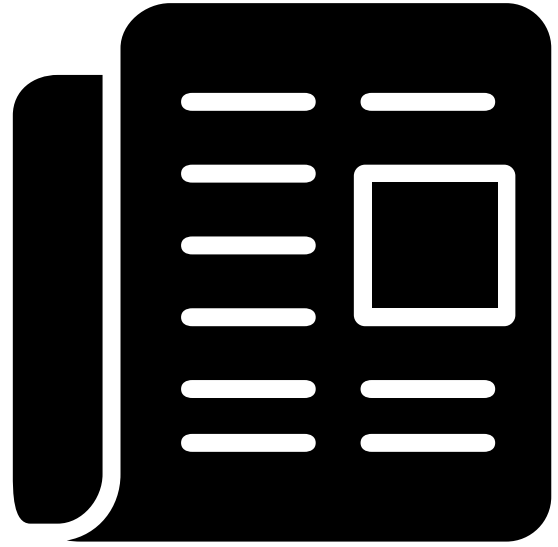
The official website of the Z.A.K.A. organization provides a great amount of insight into the work that they do, the history of the organization, and news about their current endeavours.



# 3

## **Grief and anger as families try to identify loved ones killed in Ethiopia Airlines crash**

A CBC article about the families of crash victims in Ethiopia and the work done to identify the remains, including two Israeli passengers who Z.A.K.A. went to help recover. A great opportunity to think about the international scope of Z.A.K.A.'s efforts.



# 4

## **Edward Mermelstein - Israel's Rescue and Recovery**

An episode from the 929 Podcast that is an interview with Edward Mermelstein, President of Z.A.K.A. Search and Rescue USA.

# Understanding Polarization in the Modern World

## Definition - Polarization

Polarization is an evaluative mindset that views cultural differences from an “us versus them” perspective. Polarization can take the form of Defense (“My cultural practices are superior to other cultural practices”) or Reversal (“Other cultures are better than mine”). Within Defense, cultural differences are often seen as divisive and threatening to one’s own “way of doing things.” Reversal is a mindset that values and may idealize other cultural practices while denigrating one’s own culture group. Reversal may also support the “cause” of an oppressed group, but this is done with little knowledge of what the “cause” means to people from the oppressed community.”

- Intercultural Developmental Inventory



# Understanding Polarization in the Modern World

1



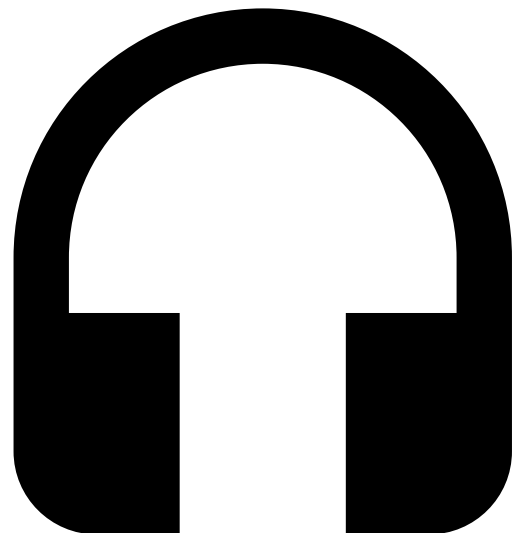
## **Us vs. Them: Immigration, Empathy and Psychology**

A great video from the Brain Craft series where science educator and psychology expert Vanessa Hill helps explain the psychology behind the Us vs. Them mentality.

2

## **Tribalism: How we overcome the "Us" vs. "Them" Mentality**

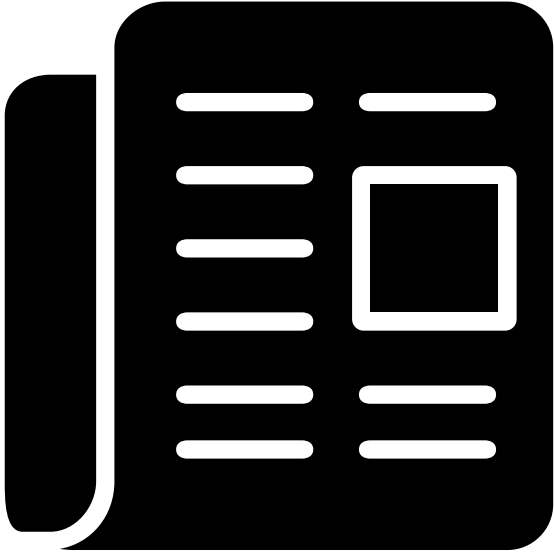
An episode of Alan Alda's podcast "Clear + Vivid" about the increasing polarization of the world. An overview of the topic and some suggestions from a variety of guests including politicians and comedians.



### 3

#### **Why the Israel-Palestine conversation is so polarized**

An article from Vox that dives into why the conversation around Israel is so polarizing, with a particular focus on some of the psychological factors behind our desire to find information that supports our initial understanding.



### 4

#### **Why We're Polarized by Ezra Klein**

A book that looks at the polarization of United States politics not as a new phenomenon but as a result of a system built to be that way. An in-depth and really interesting look at this topic by a political analyst and journalist.



# Conversation Starters

## Pre-Show

What do you think it looks/sounds like to be a ZAKA volunteer /emergency care provider in a conflict zone?

What are some of the ethical dilemmas emergency care providers might face?

What does it mean when we talk about how the world is currently polarized?

How does that polarization impact you as students in Canada?

# Conversation Starters

## Post Show

What was the impact of having Jacob constantly in motion for the whole play ? Why do you think the team chose a treadmill for the design?

How did the play touch on us vs. them/polarization in the world?

How did Jacob change from the beginning to the end of the play?

What questions are you still left with as an audience member?