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Dairy Queen Days

Drama/Comedy by Robert Inman



Dairy Queen Days

Drama/Comedy. By Robert Inman. *Cast: 4m., 3w.* On Trout Moseley's 16th birthday, his father, Rev. Joe Pike Moseley, a 300-pound Georgia minister, bolts from the Easter Sunday service, jumps on a motorcycle, and rides off to Texas. For Trout, it's the latest in a series of calamities that began when his mother, Irene, was hospitalized for severe depression. In an attempt to save his ministry, Joe Pike is brought back from Texas and is assigned to a church in his hometown of Moseley, Georgia—founded by his family years ago and a place he has been trying to escape for most of his life. And thus begins an eventful summer for Trout. His Aunt Alma (Joe Pike's sister) keeps reminding him of the burden of his family history—what it means to be a Moseley in Moseley—and Joe Pike agonizes through an acute case of theological angst. Trout's Uncle Cicero provides down-to-earth counsel (“When all hell breaks loose, save your own ass.”), but Trout feels adrift, trying, at 16, to figure out who he is while everything around him seems to be coming unhinged. He finds refuge in a job at the local Dairy Queen, where his evolving relationship with Keats Dubarry, the crippled daughter of a bitter textile mill activist, begins to provide some stability in his increasingly chaotic world. Eventually, all hell does break loose and Trout must find a way to save himself, become his own person, and move on with his life. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Code D97.*

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DAIRY QUEEN DAYS

By
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Dairy Queen Days premiered at Blowing Rock Stage Company, Blowing Rock, N.C., October 2006. Produced and directed by Kenneth Kay, stage management by Lisa Lamont,* scenic design by Lyle Baskin, costume design by Cheryl Hart, properties artisan was Jesseca Terhaar, lighting design by Mike Winkleman, sound design by Gary Smith, technical director was Tim Billman and general manager was Robert Miller Jr. The original cast was:

TROUT Ben Mackel*
JOE PIKE Gary Lee Smith*
ALMA Jessica K. Peterson*
CICERO Joe Tomko*
GRACE Mindy Lee Franks
HERSCHEL Ed Pilkington*
KEATS Gwen Edwards

*Denotes member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

DAIRY QUEEN DAYS

CHARACTERS

TROUT MOSELEY 16, the great-grandson of Moseley's
founder, laboring under the burden of
family history

JOE PIKE MOSELEY Trout's father, minister and
ex-football player, struggling
with personal and theological angst

ALMA Joe Pike's older sister, president of Moseley
Textile Mill and keeper of the family flame

CICERO Alma's husband, local hardware store owner
and police chief

KEATS DUBARRY. . . . daughter of an embittered mill worker,
crippled in childhood by an accident

GRACE VREDEMEYER. choir director at Moseley
Memorial Methodist Church

HERSCHEL BENDER owner of the Dairy Queen

SETTING: Primarily, the small town of Moseley, Georgia,
founded in the early part of the last century by the Moseley
family, which still tightly controls it. The name "Moseley" is on
virtually every building. Moseley has fallen into decline in the
years since it was bypassed by an interstate highway. The play
begins in the town of Ohatchee, some distance from Moseley.

TIME: Summer, the present.

ACT ONE

- Scene 1 Ohatchee Church
- Scene 2 The Atlanta Institute
- Scene 3 Trout's Room
- Scene 4 Downtown Moseley
- Scene 5 High School Hallway
- Scene 6 Texas
- Scene 7 Trout's Room/The Parsonage
- Scene 8 Moseley Church
- Scene 9 Alma's Dining Room
- Scene 10 Cicero's Patrol Car
- Scene 11 The Dairy Queen
- Scene 12 The Parsonage Kitchen
- Scene 13 Downtown Moseley
- Scene 14 Moseley Mill
- Scene 15 Moseley Church

ACT TWO

- Scene 16 Church Social Hall/The Parsonage
- Scene 17 The Dairy Queen
- Scene 18 The Parsonage Steps, Night
- Scene 19 The Dairy Queen
- Scene 20 The Church
- Scene 21 Downtown Moseley
- Scene 22 Joe Pike's Jail Cell
- Scene 23 The Mill
- Scene 24 The Dairy Queen, Night

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 – OHATCHEE CHURCH

(Church organ music as the curtain rises. Lights up on the church sanctuary. TROUT enters. Music under as he looks around, then turns to the audience.)

TROUT. Ohatchee Methodist Church. Easter Sunday morning. The day before my sixteenth birthday. There's a big crowd. *(The buzz and hum of the congregation. TROUT sits on a pew.)* We're all sitting here, wearing our Easter clothes and Sunday faces, waiting on Dad. The first hymn is over, and he's still not here. And then... *(Sound of a motorcycle engine, overpowering the music.)* I hear that and I think, "Oh my God." *(Sound of the motorcycle pulling to a stop, the engine dies.)* Everybody in Ohatchee, Georgia, knows that Reverend Joe Pike Moseley has a motorcycle, but nobody, especially me, ever imagined he'd ride the dang thing to church.

(JOE PIKE bustles in, pulling on a black ministerial robe over faded jeans and scuffed cowboy boots. He crosses to the minister's chair and slumps into it, a look of pained distraction on his face.)

TROUT *(cont'd)*. A minute goes by. Two. Everybody looks at Dad, then everybody looks at each other, and then ev-

erybody looks at me. I'm just about to crawl under the pew...

(JOE PIKE rouses himself. He moves to the pulpit and stands for a moment, looking out over the congregation with a wan smile.)

JOE PIKE. Well, now. Good to see so many folks in church today. Lots of folks we only see once a year.

TROUT. Dad calls 'em "tourists," but not to their faces.

JOE PIKE. A day when we get all gussied up in our new Easter finery to celebrate our Risen Lord. Better once a year than never, I suppose. So let's get started here... with the...ah... *(fumbles with papers)* ...let's see, the, ah...

TROUT. Scripture lesson?

JOE PIKE. Ah-hah! The scripture lesson. Yes indeed. The lesson from the scriptures. *(He picks up the pulpit Bible and flips slowly through the pages. He stops and stares blankly at a page. Then he lowers the Bible, pulls a handkerchief from a pocket, and mops his brow.)* I can't do this. Not today. I'm sorry, but I've got to go. *(He exits in a rush. From offstage, the sound of the motorcycle engine firing up, then running through gears as it pulls away and fades into the distance.)*

SCENE 2 – THE ATLANTA INSTITUTE

(Lights up on TROUT, sitting on a bench.)

TROUT. But that's not where it started. This is where it started, or at least I think it did...a couple of months earlier...with Mom. She's always been a quiet person, but over the past year or so, she kept getting quieter and quieter, until she just wasn't there at all. And then she... *(a helpless gesture)* ...well, that was when we brought her here to Atlanta. To the Institute.

(JOE PIKE enters, looking over his shoulder, stopping at the bench.)

JOE PIKE. She's got a nice room. *(No response.)* Already got her name tag on the door: "Irene Moseley." *(No response.)* A good view of the grounds and the duck pond.

TROUT. What did the doctor say?

JOE PIKE. Well, nothing yet. They'll get her settled, do an evaluation, decide on a course of treatment...

TROUT. When is she gonna be well, Dad? When is she coming home?

JOE PIKE. That depends.

TROUT. On what?

JOE PIKE. Mom, mostly. I think.

TROUT. You're talking in circles.

JOE PIKE. Trout, I just don't know. Nobody does, not right now. We'll have to be patient.

TROUT. And what are we gonna do in the meantime... while we're being patient?

JOE PIKE. The best we can, I suppose. Maybe try to be patient with each other. Try to keep body and soul together. You clean, I'll cook.

TROUT. Hah! You don't even know how to make grits.

JOE PIKE. Well, there's always Dairy Queen.

SCENE 3 – TROUT'S ROOM

(Lights up on the room. TROUT enters.)

TROUT. So, it was just Dad and me, and for a while, I guess we did okay. I tried not to leave my dirty socks on the floor, and we ate a lot of meals at Dairy Queen. Hey, I'm not hard to get along with, especially for a teenager. So we're rocking along, trying not to get on each other's nerves, and then...

(Light up on JOE PIKE, sitting on a stool, tinkering with a motorcycle carburetor.)

TROUT *(cont'd)*. ...Dad comes home with the motorcycle. It was in pretty sad shape. He worked on it, day and night, out in the garage behind the parsonage. The word got around pretty quick: "You hear what the preacher's up to now?" Nobody seemed to know what to think or say, so they all kept their distance. *(TROUT takes a couple of steps toward JOE PIKE, who keeps working.)* I thought maybe Dad would ask me to help. Here I was, almost sixteen, and anything with wheels on it was pretty fascinating. But no, it was just him and the motorcycle. So I tried to put a good face on things. Maybe it

was gonna be a birthday present. Cool. (*Light down on JOE PIKE.*) But then it was Easter Sunday and...well, you saw what happened. What was I supposed to do? When he was standing up there looking spooked, was I supposed to get up and help him? I don't know what he needs help *with*. So I just sat there, and Dad took off. And not a word from him until the next day... (*A telephone rings.*) Hello.

(*Light up on JOE PIKE, a motorcycle helmet tucked under his arm.*)

JOE PIKE. Hey, son.

TROUT. Dad! Where the heck are you? I've been worried.

JOE PIKE. Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

TROUT. What are you doing in Hattiesburg, Mississippi?

JOE PIKE. Had a little trouble with the bike. Electrical thing. A guy's fixing it.

TROUT. You had to go all the way to Mississippi?

JOE PIKE. It's on the way to Texas.

TROUT. What's in Texas?

JOE PIKE. You know, I used to play football in Texas.

TROUT. But that was years ago. Before Mom and me.

JOE PIKE. Yeah, it was.

TROUT. Well...when are you gonna be back?

JOE PIKE. Look, there's some chicken pot pies in the freezer. You can do 'em in the microwave or the oven. Instructions on the box. Poke holes in the top with a fork before you put 'em in. The pie, not the box.

TROUT. Dad, for Christ's sake...

JOE PIKE. And there's some money in the top drawer of my dresser. Trout, son, I need you to hang in there with

me for a bit, okay? Some things I need to take care of.
(*A click as JOE PIKE hangs up. Light down on him.*)

TROUT. Can you believe that? Texas. He didn't even say, "Happy Birthday." I'm sixteen years old today. Sixteen. I'm supposed to be flaky, irresponsible, hormone driven. So why should I have to be the only sane person in the family? (*Beat.*) Well, that was Monday. All week at school, everybody avoided me...like I was, you know, contagious or something. My girlfriend dumped me. Then on Friday...

(*ALMA enters. She's a prim, no-nonsense woman.*)

TROUT (*cont'd*). Aunt Alma...what are you doing here?

ALMA. I've come to take you home.

TROUT. I am home.

ALMA. To Moseley, Trout. Where you should have been all along.

TROUT. Why?

ALMA. Your father's had a breakdown.

TROUT. I know. He called from Hattiesburg. Something about the wiring.

ALMA. No, it's a good deal more than that. He's in the hospital.

TROUT. What? Is he okay?

ALMA. He needs some rest, from what I'm told. Your uncle Cicero is going to Texas to pick him up. And then...the bishop is transferring him to Moseley to take over the pulpit there and see if he can get his act together. So start packing. A truck will be here in a few minutes. (*ALMA exits briskly. TROUT stands there, stunned.*)

TROUT. Oh, my God.

SCENE 4 – DOWNTOWN MOSELEY

(ALMA, CICERO, GRACE and HERSCHEL. Light up on each as he or she speaks. They don't acknowledge each other. CICERO wears a police chief's uniform. HERSCHEL wears an apron and cap.)

ALMA. Moseley, Georgia. Population...

CICERO. ...1,326. Been that way for as long as anybody can remember. Unwritten rule: when somebody new arrives, somebody has to either leave or die.

ALMA. When my grandfather, Broadus Moseley, came down from North Carolina in the early 1900s, this place was flat busted. He built a cotton mill and put people to work.

GRACE. Three years ago, my husband Fesper came home and said, "Grace, the Agricultural Extension Service is transferring me to Moseley." I said, "Where the hell is that?"

CICERO. Not many new folks arrive in Moseley. Not much to arrive *for*.

HERSCHEL. When I retired from the Army two years ago and came to Moseley to open the Dairy Queen, I built it out by the Interstate. Moseley itself looks weary and worn-out.

ALMA. Broadus built a village of homes around the mill for the workers. He built a town, established businesses and schools...and a church, Moseley Methodist. He was a pious man.

CICERO. Me? I'm the police chief...and, I own the hardware store. Neither one is a full-time job. Together, they're not a full-time job.

HERSCHEL. Moseley folks welcomed my Dairy Queen. They said the last new business was a coin-operated laundry that opened in 1978.

CICERO. It lasted a year.

ALMA. After Broadus passed on, the church was named Moseley *Memorial* Methodist, in his honor. Leland Moseley, my father, saw to that. He, too was a pious man.

GRACE. A year after we got here, Fesper dropped dead on the sidewalk in front of City Hall. I think his heart gave out from boredom. By then, I was the choir director at the Methodist church, so I just stayed on.

HERSCHEL. When I got to town, I joined the choir at the Methodist church...

GRACE & HERSCHEL (*singing*).

**WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED UP YONDER
WHEN THE ROLL IS CALLED UP YONDER I'LL
BE THERE.**

HERSCHEL. ...and I tried to join the Chamber of Commerce.

GRACE. There isn't one.

ALMA. My father expanded the mill, paved the streets, added fluoride to the water supply, and... (*Reveal a traffic light blinking red, yellow, green.*)

CICERO. ...put up a traffic light. I noticed something odd about that traffic light...there wasn't an intersection. Mister Leland said, "Cicero, I put it there to slow things down." (*Traffic sounds.*) All the traffic from Augusta to

Atlanta used to go right through the middle of Moseley.
And stopped, by God, at that traffic light.

HERSCHEL. When they built the Interstate, out where the Dairy Queen is now, all the traffic moved out there.
(Traffic sounds fade.)

CICERO. Now, you can stand here and not see a moving vehicle for twenty minutes at a time. But that traffic light, by God, is still there.

ALMA. So, you see, I am descended from civic visionaries. Without Moseleys, Moseley would be just a piece of worn-out dirt.

HERSCHEL. Folks don't seem to mind driving a couple of miles out to the Dairy Queen. Maybe it's because I'm in the happiness business. Ice cream makes you happy.

GRACE. And Moseley sure could use some happiness.

(CICERO, GRACE and HERSCHEL exit. Lights up on ALMA and the town. ALMA calls out...)

ALMA. Trout, get a move on.

TROUT *(offstage)*. Coming, Aunt Alma.

(TROUT enters, struggling with a large cardboard box.)

ALMA. Put that thing down. Moseleys don't lift and tote. Moseleys tell *other* people what to lift and tote. *(TROUT sets the box down.)*

TROUT. Dad says a fellow ought to do his own lifting and toting. One time in a sermon, he said folks need to get off their fatty acids.

ALMA. Trout!

TROUT. Fat-ty a-cids, Aunt Alma.

ALMA. Your father has always had an earthy way of speaking. I suppose he picked it up in locker rooms. It's unbecoming for a minister, and a bad influence on an impressionable child.

TROUT. Aunt Alma, I'm sixteen years old. By now, I've heard just about everything.

ALMA. Yes, I suppose you have. (*Indicates the town.*) Well, here it is.

TROUT. Well...well, yeah. Here it is.

ALMA. I knew you'd like it. Moseley is a wonderful place, Trout. Full of opportunities.

TROUT. It is?

ALMA. Especially for you.

TROUT. For me?

ALMA. Someday, this will all be yours.

TROUT. Mine?

ALMA. You're the only heir in the family, and when I'm gone, the mill will be yours to own and operate, to continue the tradition. Moseley Mill is the vibrant economic core of this community, Trout, an icon of progress and prosperity.

TROUT. Progress and prosperity?

ALMA. Moseleys have influence in every aspect of community life—religion, education, government, social affairs...

TROUT. Dad says that every time a Moseley breaks wind, everybody else in Moseley smells it.

ALMA. Trout, that'll be enough of your father's quotations.

TROUT. Yes ma'am.

ALMA. Now, I don't expect you to know everything about being a Moseley in Moseley. Goodness knows, you've

been bounced around from one parsonage to another, and you haven't spent much time here. Your father has never taken much interest in his hometown. But we're going to get things back on track, Trout. Do you know what I mean?

TROUT. Not exactly.

ALMA. Well, you will. Now, come along. (*TROUT starts to pick up the cardboard box.*) I told you, don't bother with that. The men from the mill will take care of it.

TROUT. It's some stuff from Dad's study at the church. He's mighty peculiar about people messing with stuff from his study.

ALMA. Peculiar. Yes, indeed.

TROUT. And... (*reaching into the box*) my tennis racquet. I'm pretty peculiar about people messing with my tennis racquet, too.

ALMA. My father considered tennis a frivolous game. That's why he wouldn't allow a tennis court to be built in Moseley. (*ALMA exits.*)

TROUT. There's not a tennis court here? You're kidding! (*TROUT looks about. His gaze stops on the traffic light.*) And another thing, Aunt Alma...that stupid traffic light. There's no intersection. (*TROUT turns to the audience.*) What *is* this? It's like I've been jerked up by a tornado and set down in a foreign country. No tennis court? A traffic light and no intersection? A downtown that looks...desperate. And the name "Moseley" on everything. Moseley Bank. Moseley Hardware. Moseley Memorial Methodist Church. Moseley High School. (*Pauses.*) Yea, verily...as my father would say...Moseley High School. I get here on Thursday with one week and one day left in the school year...