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Dramatic Publishing

Tim Clue

Spike Manton



Leaving Iowa

The Comedy About
Family Vacations

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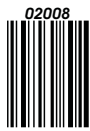
Comedy. By Tim Clue and Spike Manton. Cast: 3m., 3w., May be expanded to 26 actors (4m., 4w., 18 m. or w.). The spark behind *Leaving Iowa* comes from being children of parents from the now dubbed "greatest generation." The story is a toast to their idealism and character and a little roast of their undying dedication to the classic family road trip. More specifically, it is the story of Don Browning, a middle-aged writer, who returns home and decides to finally take his father's ashes to his childhood home, as requested. But when Don discovers Grandma's house is now a grocery store, he begins traveling across Iowa searching for a proper resting place for his father. This father-and-son road trip shifts smoothly from the present to Don's memories of the annual, torturous vacations of his childhood. Don's existential journey leads him to reconcile his past and present at the center of the United States. *Leaving Iowa* is a postcard to anyone who has ever found himself or herself driving alone on a road, revisiting fond memories of his or her youth. Premiered at the Purple Rose Theatre Company. *Minimal set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes.*

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LEAVING IOWA

The Comedy About Family Vacations

by

TIM CLUE and SPIKE MANTON



Dramatic Publishing

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(LEAVING IOWA)

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“*Leaving Iowa* premiered at the Purple Rose Theatre Company
on January 22, 2004, in Chelsea, Michigan,
directed by Anthony Caselli.”

Acknowledgments

Thanks to artistic director Guy Sanville, *Leaving Iowa* premiered at Jeff Daniels' Purple Rose Theatre Company on January 22, 2004, in Chelsea, Mich. It was directed by Anthony Caselli, with John Lepard as Don, Grant Krause as Dad, Elizabeth Ann Townsend as Mom, Teri Clark as Sis and Jim Porterfield as the multiple character guy. We will always be grateful for the opportunity the Purple Rose extended to us.

A special thanks to Shawn Pace our production manager for his extraordinary work and guidance throughout the process.

LEAVING IOWA

For an ensemble cast of six actors

CHARACTERS

DON BROWNING. . . adult writer, young boy in flashbacks

DAD Don's dad

MOM. Don's mom, past and present

SIS. Don's sister, past and present

MULTIPLE CHARACTER GUY - in order of appearance

FARMER JOHNSON farmer with silo

GRANDPA Don's grandfather

CART GUY grocery store employee

UNCLE PHIL Don's uncle

JOE HOFINGERS farmer with hoe

AMISH GUY Amish peddler at flea market

CIVIL WAR GUY Civil War performer/narrator

JACK SINGER. Don's childhood friend, now professor

MECHANIC fixes Don's car

PARK RANGER. park ranger

CLERK unhappy old man

WAYNE. stoic waiter with mullet

BOB hog farmer

MULTIPLE CHARACTER GAL - in order of appearance

- MRS. JOHNSON farmer wife with silo
- GRANDMA Don's grandmother
- AUNT PHYLLIS. Don's aunt
- AMISH GAL Amish peddler at flea market
- MUSEUM ASSISTANT Civil War Guy's announcer
- JAMIE. mechanic
- DRUNK LADY patron in hotel
- JESSIE. talkative waitress
- JUDY hog farmer Bob's wife

See Production Notes, Set Notes, Sound Design CD Notes
and Prop List at end of play..

PRODUCTION NOTES

Leaving Iowa is a memory play that weaves together past and present. In the premiere production at the Purple Rose Theatre, director Tony Caselli chose to have the dad present on stage, watching and listening to Don as he remembers moments from his youth and contemplates his current dilemma. Thankfully, Dad did not appear as a ghost, but more as a reassuring presence that represents the influence our parents have inside all of us, even when they are gone. This choice also made for quick, smooth transitions and kept this sentimental comedy squarely where it needed to be—in the mind of Don and in the heart of a dad that tried too hard. Also, realize that Don’s memories are not reality but rather an exaggeration of his pain and love of these family road trips. Be bold in both the emotion and the silliness.

Some tangible suggestions:

1. Don’t play the movement in the car literally. Have the kids stand up, allow Mom and Dad to jump up outside the car to discipline the children; whatever works for the moment. Playing the confines of an actual car is boring and comically restrictive.
2. Make sure the kids in the back seat sit high enough above Mom and Dad so we can see their reactions.
3. We encourage a simple choice when considering the car itself, such as the use of four stools or wooden boxes. The boxes have proven to be sturdier, allowing for stronger physical play, but both have been successful.

4. A minimalist approach to the set seems to serve the play best, highlighting character over time-consuming set changes, with actors themselves moving set pieces on, off and around the stage as they perform.
5. Once the urn is established, feel free to have Don stick it behind the seat until he needs it. The urn is a necessary setup device but a visual downer. Besides, Dad's on-stage presence listening to his son is more important and obviously more compelling than the urn.
6. Some productions of the play have made use of a cap for Don to help indicate switching from past to present.
7. Don't be consumed with how old or young Don and Sis might be. Play the exuberance, playfulness and typical give and go that a young angst-filled brother and sister share. The script has Don as the little brother, but you may cast an older Don if you choose and use "big brother" on lines where he is referred to as "little brother."
8. Note on Don's narration: When Don is speaking out loud as adult Don, do everything you can to avoid having him sound like a typical narrator. He should always be in the moment, trying to figure out what is the next best move. Don's talking out loud to himself gives us the feeling of being in Don's head instead of being lead down a path. However, when Don is a child, direct address feels natural and is the best and most humorous approach. Still, you must always keep him in the scene, never feeling the need to step out and stop the action in order to speak.

SOUND DESIGN CD NOTES

The Sound Design CD Set is required for performance.

The set contains original background and incidental music (such as Driving music, Phone Call music), transition SFX (such as a car passing), and complimentary SFX (car starting, picture sound).

Pre-Show and Intermission Music: Original songs by Sons of the Never Wrong.

The use of specific sounds and an original musical score fill a critical and invaluable role in bringing this travel play to life and helping pull Don and the story fluidly and effortlessly from scene to scene. The music and sound almost serve as a second narrator; a simple car passing adds information in many ways. There are more than 50 sound cues used in many instances, all crafted and refined from the early productions. They are the glue that holds the story together.

SET

Some productions have incorporated elaborate set elements, others have been intentionally sparse. The show has been produced on both proscenium and thrust stages; it adapts well to either.

These are some of the more essential pieces that need to be considered:

ACT I

- **CAR:** The most versatile car has been made of wood boxes, two for the front seat (approx 16” square) and a back seat that is a bench (36” high, 24” deep, 48” wide). Stools have also been used for all four of the seats. The most critical aspect is to make sure the back seat is significantly higher than the front seat to make the children visible to the audience. Another important element is storage for small props for all characters, e.g., the traveler’s guide, kids’ books, View-Master, etc. This can be done easily with side pockets attached to the seats. Lastly, this entire design must be mobile to be easily struck for final scene.
- **SILO:** It’s been everything from a ladder on a pole to a visual-only silo to a climbable silo.
- **FENCE:** This has been a small piece of picket fence held by the actors (i.e. Grandma and Grandpa), or some have chosen to make it an actual picket fence that is part of the set (but still carried off with Grandma and Grandpa).

- **GROCERY CART:** An actual grocery cart; can be the smaller drugstore size.
- **PHONE NOOK:** For Mom; used four times—quick on and off. Phone itself can be merely implied (offstage focus) but not pantomimed. (Note: Don’s cell phone should be “real.”)
- **BAR SCENE:** Several options: Jack and Don have stood behind the back seat of the car with beers in hand, or they’ve used a little bar table that flips out. Some people have chosen to make the bar in Act I the same as the diner table in Act II.

ACT II

- **HOTEL DESK (FOR CLERK):** Can be a flip-down desk, a roll-out desk, or something else. Whatever it is, a brochure rack is a welcome touch versus the brochures lying on the counter.
- **DINER:** Again, the back seat has been used, or whatever bar scene set items that are used. **NOTE:** Don needs to be facing out to audience.
- **CENTER POLE:** The pole must have a sign on it: “The Center – You Are Here.” Dad brings the pole out (as Bob and Don walk to the Center) and places it approximately center stage, depending on other staging choices. **NOTE:** car must be struck.

PROP LIST

Mark Twain storybooks (4)	Preset in pockets of car. (You will ultimately need 6 books total; extra books in the pockets of the car are recommended to avoid tracking problems.)
Steering wheel	Dad enters with it.
Traveler's guide	Starts off with Mom. Used throughout show.
Offstage crash box	Used twice in this scene: Once at the top of the scene (single crash) then again when Sis is looking for urn.
Urn in a box with dust	Sis enters with it. The urn alone will be used throughout show.
Baby powder for dust on urn	A thin coat should be sprinkled on top of it to be blown off.
Stenographer's notepad with pen	Should be preset in Don's pocket.
One arrowhead on a string	Sis gives it to Don.
Small sack lunch	Mom brings in from offstage and gives to Don.
Jacket (not worn)	Mom brings in from offstage and gives to Don.
Don's baseball cap	Mom brings in from offstage and gives to Don.
Vintage View-Master w/ slides	Sis enters with it.
Hand towel	Mom comes out with it.
Mark Twain storybooks (2)	Dad enters with them.
Mom's oversized handbag w/ multiple compartments	Mom enters with it.
Vintage magazine	In Mom's handbag.

Cross-stitch for Mom in car
Notecard
Nickel
String for cat's cradle
Bag of lollipops
Plate w/ Rice Krispie treat the size of cement block

Gate
Grocery cart
Walkie-Talkie
Mixing bowl and spoon
Cell phone (flip-not stylish)
Vintage Polaroid camera w/ neck strap
Old can for a spittoon
Old hoe
Arrowhead
Beer bottles (2)
Amish quilt
Local tour map
Musket with bayonet
Notecard
Tennis ball for bayonet tip
Small mechanic's flashlight

In Mom's handbag.
Preset on Sis. Sis reads her speech off of it.
Preset on Dad. Dad hands it to Sis.
Don and Sis use it.
Mom hands out two per show.
Grandma enters with it. Should be one giant Krispie treat. (Literally, cement block-sized.)
Grandpa enters with it.
Pushed on from offstage.
For Cart Guy.
Sis enters with it.
Preset in Don's pocket.
Preset in Mom's bag. Does not need to work.
Joe Hofingers brings it on.
Joe Hofingers brings it on.
Preset in Dad's pocket.
Jack enters with them.
Amish Guy enters with it.
Dad enters with it.
Civil War Guy enters with it.
Museum Assistant comes in with it.
Preset in Civil War Guy's pocket.
Mechanic enters with it.

(continued next page)

Phone	For hotel.
Brochure rack	For hotel.
Key rack	For hotel.
Multiple keys	For hotel.
Brochures (a lot of them)	For hotel.
Counter bell	For hotel.
Neck brace	For Clerk.
Cane or crutch	For Clerk.
Ice bucket w/ ice in it	Drunk Lady enters with it.
Big flashlight	Park Ranger enters with it.
Caddy for ketchup/mustard, sugar, salt/pepper, etc.	Preset in upstage box seat.
Coffee cup and saucer	Wayne enters with it.
Coffee pot, liquid	Wayne enters with it.
Menus	Preset in upstage box seat.
Waitress pen and pad	Jessie enters with it.
A few dollar bills	Preset on Don. Don gives to Wayne.
Traveler's guide	Don enters with it. (You will need 2.)
Polaroid camera (functioning – 1 photo)	Bob enters with it.
A bulk of Polaroid film	One photo is taken per show.
Sharpie	Bob enters with it.
Center Pole w/ sign (“You are here”)	Dad enters with it.

ACT I

(SFX: Music: “I’ve Been Iowhere” used before the show begins. SFX: Pre-show announcement and song: “1000 Miles to the Middle of Everywhere.” SFX: Driving music opens play to DAD driving.)

Lights up—a family driving at night. DON and SIS are sleeping in the back seat and MOM is sleeping in the front seat. DAD is driving, tired, doing all the things one might do to stay awake, but his head nods into his chest once, pops back up, and then again and pops back. On the third head nod his head stays down, fully asleep. After a beat: SFX: Loud truck horn blast. DAD’s head snaps up as the family is startled awake.)

DAD & FAMILY. AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!

(Everyone is disoriented.)

MOM. Oh goodness, honey, what was that?

DAD. Nothing, nothing. Just some truck out of control.

Probably nodding off at the wheel.

SIS. Mom?

DAD. Go back to sleep, sweetpea.

DON. Dad?

DAD. Close your eyes, big guy. Back to sleep, everyone.

(*To MOM.*) Just some trucker nodding off a bit.

MOM. What was it?

DAD. Just some crazy sleepy trucker, close your eyes, honey.

MOM. Oh my goodness, how long have I been out?

DAD. Not long, sweetheart. We're OK. Just close your eyes...and go back to sleep.

MOM. Where are we?

DAD. Almost there. Close your—

MOM. Honey, where are we?

SIS. Dad, where are we?

MOM. Shouldn't we be home by now? (*Pause.*) Honey, are we—

DAD. No, we are not lost.

DON. Dad?

DAD. Close your eyes, big guy.

MOM. What road is this?

DON. What's going on?

SIS. I think he's lost.

DAD. Close your eyes, sweetie.

SIS. What time is it?

MOM. It's 3:30.

MOM, DON & SIS. 3:30!

MOM. Honey...

DAD. Little mix-up.

SIS. Dad!

MOM. Do we have a mile marker?

DAD. No.

MOM. So we are lost.

DAD. No, we are not.

MOM. Then why aren't we home?

DAD. A little out of our way maybe, (*MOM is looking for mile markers*) but not lost. We're getting there.

SIS. Getting where?

DAD. Calm down, honey.

SIS. Where are we getting? (*Beat.*) Where are we? (*Beat.*)
Why isn't anyone answering me?

DAD. Because it's time to go to sleep. Everyone back to sleep.

MOM. Help me look for a mile marker.

DON. I'm thirsty.

MOM. In a minute, Don.

(SIS punches DON in shoulder. Together they hunch around DAD.)

DON.

SIS.

Dad!

Dad!

DAD. I said back to sleep.

MOM. Is everybody looking? A mile marker would really help.

(Now they hunch over MOM.)

SIS.

DON.

Mom?

Mom?

MOM. Everyone, I'm looking for a mile marker. We need a mile marker. Can we all just look for a mile marker?!

DAD (*snatches map from MOM*). Here, let's take a look.

MOM. Honey, not while you're driving.

DAD. MOM.
I got it, got it. I got it. Sweetheart?

*(DAD focused on the map, veers into other lane. SFX:
Loud honk.)*

MOM. DON & SIS.
HONEY, look out! DAAAAAD!

MOM *(snatches map back)*. Give me that! What in heaven's name are you thinking!? *(Smacks DAD with map.)*

DAD. I think I've got it now.

MOM *(beginning to fray)*. Honey, we need a mile marker; kids, we need a mile marker; can we all just look for a mile marker!?

SIS. Mom, this is not fair. This is not fair.

DAD. Let's all settle down.

SIS. Mom, it's not fair, it's not fair. *(Stuttering.)* It's it's it's it's it's like we're hostages...

DAD. Stop it or I will pull over. I swear I will.

(While SIS continues, MOM, DAD and DON repeat their lines in a crescendo of chaos until DAD announces that he is pulling over.)

SIS. Why do we need a family vote if the promise isn't going to matter?

DAD. Who's not sleeping?

SIS. Why do we vote if it's not going to matter?

MOM.
Honey, not now!

DAD.
Who's not sleeping!

DON. Mo-o-om—

MOM. Looking for a mile marker... *(Repeat and build with others.)*

SIS. If it's not going to matter then why do we vote? Right, Mom!?

DON. Mo-o-o-om—

MOM. Need a mile marker.

DAD. I'm warning you!

SIS. Right, Mom?

DON. Mo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-om—

DAD. I'm warning you. *(Barely controlled.)* I am warning you.

SIS *(adamantly)*. DON.
Well, if it's a vote and a Mo-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-om!
promise, then I promise
I am never voting again!

DAD *(at the end of his rope)*. OK, that's it, that is it!
That's it! That is it! I am pulling over!

(SFX: Car on gravel. DAD pulls over. KIDS heads snap up and they retreat quickly to the back seat. There is a long silence while DAD collects himself.)

MOM. We still need a mile marker.

DAD. Everyone, we are not lost. We've uuhhh, just gotten a little off track.

SIS. Mom?

DON.
Shh!

MOM.
Shh!

MOM (*to DAD with great concern*). Honey?

DAD. OK, OK, OK, look. (*Takes off his glasses.*) Here's the deal.

(*SFX: Car passes. Special on DON. The FAMILY transitions off.*)

DON (*almost in one breath*). Here's the deal. About forty-six hours ago I flew in from Boston to return to my hometown of Winterset, Iowa, and ended up at a hog farm somewhere not too far from Lebanon, Kansas. Which is interesting...

(*SFX: Car pass.*)

DON *cont'd*). ...because I had only planned a short drive up and over to my father's childhood home in Mount Union, Iowa, but if that were the case I probably would have never pulled over a few hours away from home in an attempt to try and write this story down. A story I promised my mom I would never tell anyone, which is something you shouldn't do if you write a newspaper column, because you almost always end up doing the opposite. But because this trip ended up being the kind of trip you can't ever plan, and because I think of it as more of an adventure than a story...I felt compelled to get it down. I mean adventures in Iowa are like steep hills—hard to come by. So here's the deal.

(SFX: Boxes drop loudly offstage. DON is startled. Lights change. He heads over.)

DON *(cont'd)*. Mom, are you OK?

MOM *(offstage)*. Donald, we don't have time for this.

DON. Mom, I can come down to help you look for it.

OLDER SIS *(offstage)*. I wouldn't if I were you, big brother.

MOM *(offstage)*. We don't have time for this, Don. Not today.

(OLDER SIS enters from the basement.)

OLDER SIS. Don, we can't find it and I'm not happy about this! Not happy!

DON. Sorry, Sis, three years.

OLDER SIS. I know how long it's been, Don, and don't talk to me like that. I begged you not to do this, and especially not today.

(MOM enters flustered and dusty, also from basement.)

MOM. Donald, I give up, I give up, I give up. I can't find it.

DON. Mom, you looked everywhere?

MOM. I've looked everywhere I've looked, young man. *(Flustered.)* Donald, we don't have time for this, we have company coming tonight and you need to relax!

DON. I am relaxed.

MOM. Then why so busy, busy, busy? We thought you were coming home for Joey's baptism, for your sister, and for the dinner tonight, but not for this.

DON. Mom, I came home for all of it.

(OLDER SIS exits back to the basement, upset.)

OLDER SIS. This feels like very poor timing, big brother,
very poor timing.

DON. Can I help?

OLDER SIS. I don't need your help, big brother!

DON. Mom? *(MOM starts to cry from the anxiety.)* Mom,
I'm sorry, but...

(DON attempts to comfort his MOM but is rebuffed while OLDER SIS is shouting as she bangs boxes around looking.)

OLDER SIS *(offstage)*. Don, just because you live in a big city and write for a big newspaper does not give you the right to walk in here and turn the day upside down... This does not feel right...

(OLDER SIS enters with an urn inside a shabby box.)

OLDER SIS *(cont'd)*. Not today. This was supposed to be our time together—family time—Joey's time. Not this. Not now. *(Now center, she pulls the urn out of the box and blows the dust off. Let the moment settle.)*

MOM. You found him. *(Pause.)*

DON *(stays focused on the urn)*. My father had passed away three years ago, and instead of honoring a rather simple request to be returned to his childhood home...

MOM. Where was he?

OLDER SIS. On top of the fuse box.

DON. We left him in the basement. Three years.

MOM. Three years?

OLDER SIS. Hard to believe.

MOM. Three years.

OLDER SIS. Hard to believe.

MOM. This is all my fault.

OLDER SIS. Mom, it's not your fault.

MOM. I just left him down there.

DON.

Mom, we all did.

OLDER SIS.

Yeah, Mom, I did it, too.

MOM. For three years! No this is my fault. I could be arrested for something like this.

OLDER SIS & DON. Mom, you cannot be arrested.

MOM. Well then humiliated, which is worse. (*Beat.*) Why he wanted to be in this thing in that way I'll never know. (*Upset, near tears.*)

OLDER SIS & DON. It was cheaper. (*They start to laugh.*)

MOM. Oh for heaven's sake.

OLDER SIS. OK, OK, OK then, let's just do this, can we? (*Starts to head out the door.*)

DON. Whoa whoa whoa, where are you going with that?

OLDER SIS. Well I thought we could...

DON. No no no, we can't just go out back and scatter him around the tree.

OLDER MOM. Oh, for heaven's sake.

DON. I'm sorry, Mom, but we all know that Dad wanted to be taken back to Grandma and Grandpa's.

OLDER SIS. But, Donald, Mount Union is two hours from here.

DON. Plenty of time to get back to dinner.

OLDER SIS. Do we even know who lives there now?

DON. Mom?

MOM. I don't think so.

OLDER SIS. So, what, Don, what are you going to do, knock on the door of some stranger and say, excuse me, I'm here to fertilize the lawn?

DON.

Oh, that's nice.

MOM.

Oh, for heaven's sake!

OLDER SIS. I mean really, how long has it been since anyone's even been up there?

MOM. Well, let me think. OK, your father and I took a drive up that way after Grandma passed on...I don't know, maybe nine-ten years ago—and they had painted that beautiful old white house...

DON & OLDER SIS.

yellow—why, I'll never know.

MOM.

yellow—why, I'll never know.

MOM. OK, now stop it. Look, I should do this. I'm the one who left him down there. (*Continues under following crescendo.*)

DON. No, Mom, you have company coming.

OLDER SIS. Look, I'll get a babysitter.

DON. No no no, please.

OLDER SIS. Don, don't fight me on this. Mom has company coming and you have an early flight tomorrow.

DON. Stop, please, please, stop! (*All quiet.*) Now, none of us are any good at saying what we feel. After all, we're

from Iowa. (*Beat.*) But you both know why I should do this. OK?

(*OLDER SIS hands urn to MOM who hands it to DON.*)

MOM. OK, I'll get the keys.

DON. Now that's the Browning spirit.

MOM. And something for you to snack on.

DON. I'm fine.

OLDER SIS. If you are late for dinner...

DON. I promise, I won't be late.

MOM. I'll get you a jacket.

DON. I'm fine.

MOM. And a Krispie treat.

DON (*calling after*). Mom!

MOM. You'll need a snack on the way up... (*Offstage.*)

Don't tell me what I already know...

DON. She can't be stopped. She's an unstoppable helping machine. (*DON stops.*) Hey. (*Takes out a notepad and scribbles. Under breath.*) Unstoppable helping machine.

OLDER SIS. Give it a break, Don. It's called a vacation.

DON. I'm a writer. That's what I do. You're an irritator. That's what you do.

OLDER SIS. Funny, you're funny. Well, OK, just in case you run out of funny things to write about...

DON. What?

OLDER SIS (*hands him an arrowhead*). I found it while I was digging around down there, thought you might want it.

DON. My arrowhead!

OLDER SIS. But I'll need it back.

DON. You thief! You thief! I knew it! Which trip was this?