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Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

By

PAT MONTLEY

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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Plays on Principle (which originally included seven of the ten plays here) was premiered at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore in 2019 as part of a bicentennial celebration. The production was funded by a Creativity Grant awarded to the playwright by the Maryland State Arts Council.

CAST:

Christine Demuth	Michelle Lee
Chris Edwards	Richard Peck
Flinn Leigh Eng	Vernon Rey
Melissa Feliciano	Molly Ruhlman
Layla Hodge	Owen Sahnnow
Timothy Johnson	Sally Wall

PRODUCTION:

Director	Pat Montley
Set, Sound & Lighting Designer	Daryl Beard
Stage Managers	Naomi Berkenbilt, Javier Jaramillo
Set Crew	Jim Houston, Scott Macleod, Richard Peck, Owen Sahnnow

For Sally
my best critic
and dearest

Life/Choice

CHARACTERS

CAROL: 43, woman of any race; pro-life.

JESSIE: 25, woman of any race; pro-choice.

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A political rally on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

Question: How can we disagree without being disagreeable?

(At lights up, we see a bench and hear noise of a crowd of people. For a few seconds, sounds of two sets of many voices repeating simultaneous chants: "It's a child, not a choice!" And, "Keep abortion legal!")

CAROL (*offstage, calling to a companion*). No, you go ahead.

(CAROL enters, one shoe untied, carrying a backpack and a sign reading "It's a Child, not a Choice." She calls again to her offstage companion.)

CAROL (*cont'd*). Go on! I'll catch up. Just be a minute.

(She puts the sign down, takes off her backpack, sits and ties her shoe, her head bent over the shoe. The sounds fade out.)

JESSIE (*offstage, calling to a companion*). Yes, I'll meet you there!

(JESSIE enters, backing in, carrying a sign reading “Keep Abortion Legal.” Facing offstage, she calls.)

JESSIE *(cont’d)*. They can’t *all* be unreasonable. Humor me. *(Points over her shoulder at CAROL.)* Just want to try a little one-on-one! *(Turns, crosses to CAROL, checks out CAROL’s poster.)* Good morning.

(CAROL looks up.)

JESSIE *(cont’d)*. Oh!

CAROL. Not the “one” you were hoping to go one-on-one with?

JESSIE *(flabbergasted)*. I ... wow ... I don’t know what ... how could ... what are you ... ?

CAROL. Doing here? Same thing as you. Exercising my right to free speech.

JESSIE. But ... you volunteer at Planned Parenthood.

CAROL. Because I want to make sure women have access to contraceptives.

JESSIE. And you ... you’re a ...

CAROL. Socialist, progressive, feminist—

JESSIE *(finishing her sentence)*. Left-wing liberal! So how can you ... ?

CAROL. Come on. You know better than that. Liberals don’t all think alike.

JESSIE. Yeah. But ... on this issue?

CAROL. Why should this one be exempt?

JESSIE. Well, because ... because it’s ...

CAROL. Because *you’re* on the other side?

JESSIE. But how did that happen? I mean that *you’re* on the other side? And ... I didn’t know it.

CAROL. We live half a country apart.

JESSIE. But it's not like we don't visit, phone, text.

CAROL. We've been going to different rallies. Until this one.

JESSIE. Yeah, but I told you about mine. How come you never ... ?

CAROL. Because I know how you feel ... what you believe.

What all your friends—as well as most of mine—believe.

I guess I ... sometimes liberals are just so darn ... narrow-minded! I didn't think telling you would make a difference.

JESSIE. How could it not?!

CAROL. Anyway, you have a right to your opinion. And to act on it.

JESSIE. Yes. That was one of the most memorable lessons of my childhood.

CAROL. Good. Music to every Sunday-school teacher's ears.

JESSIE (*meaning "it's more than that"*). Come on.

CAROL. So you're acting on your right to voice your political opinion. And I'm acting on mine.

JESSIE. But ... but I thought you believe that women's lives matter.

CAROL. I do believe it.

JESSIE. That laws that impose motherhood on women are totalitarian.

CAROL. They are.

JESSIE. That children should be wanted.

CAROL. They should.

JESSIE. That my life—my woman's life—is worth something!

CAROL. It certainly is.

JESSIE. Then why? ... How can you? ... I mean, if you agree with everything I've—

CAROL. Women's lives do matter—even when they are just starting out as fetuses.

JESSIE. But what about—?

CAROL. And children *should* be wanted. That's why we have adoption.

JESSIE. That's still imposing biological motherhood on—

CAROL. Motherhood might not feel like an imposition if children were wanted and cherished by the whole community, if we had universal free childcare, if women weren't pressured into abortion by shame or poverty.

JESSIE. But we *don't* have universal childcare and—

CAROL. And your life—oh, yes, *your* precious life—is most definitely worth a great deal of something.

JESSIE (*taken aback*). Are you being ... sarcastic?

CAROL. Surely you know I mean it with all my heart.

JESSIE. Then ... what?

CAROL. Maybe I'm just afraid of ... our disposable culture? What effect will normalizing abortion have on us ... on our collective psyche? If we approve early and mid-term abortions, how soon before we're approving late-term ones? If it's allowable right up to birth, then ... well, what about after?

JESSIE. Come on! Birth is a clear and obvious line of demarcation.

CAROL. While it may remain *illegal* to kill a newborn, it may no longer be *unthinkable*—at least not for those who are less scrupulous and more desperate.

JESSIE. Really? Next you're going to say it paves the way for euthanizing old people.

CAROL. It had occurred to me ... now that I'm on my way to becoming an old person.