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Dramatic Publishing

Do Not Go Gentle



Comedy/Drama by
Suzan Zeder

Do Not Go Gentle

Comedy/Drama. By Suzan Zeder. Cast: 2m., 4w. Lillian Boedecker Barron is 84 years old, vibrant, funny, wise, and recently deceased! During her lifetime, Lillian shared a special, long-distance bond with her granddaughter, Kelly, and suffered an estrangement from her son Windsor, a Colonel in the Air Force, as he moved his family from base to base all over the world. After her death, Lillian discovers that she cannot “move on” until the rifts are somehow mended. Windsor and Kelly come from overseas to settle Lillian’s affairs and are aghast to discover that the walls of her house have been painted with wild, sometimes humorous, sometimes horrific murals and drawings. As they unravel secrets of the paintings, the two make astonishing discoveries about themselves and a special relationship between Lillian and a neighborhood child. This powerful, poignant play explores the wonder of words and the transformative power of art as it offers humor and hope to anyone who is, or has ever been, a grandparent, parent, or a child. *Single set. Approximate running time: 2 hours. Code: D64.*

Cover: Flat Rock Playhouse production featuring (l-r) Ben Mackel, Terry Loughlin, Kim Cozort, Brooks Hornsby and June Havoc. Photo: Chris Bartol.

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DO NOT GO GENTLE

by

SUZAN L. ZEDER



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(DO NOT GO GENTLE)

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In memory of Claire

DO NOT GO GENTLE was originally commissioned by the Kennedy Center's Theatre for Young People at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC, in association with the American Association of Retired Persons. It was first performed there on October 18, 1991 with the following:

Director Jim R. Hancock
Composer Robert Goldstein
Set Designer James Kronzer
Costume Designer Jane Schloss Phelan
Lighting Designer Robin Lyttle
Asst. Lighting Designer Martha Mountain
Stage Manager Connie I. Lane
Producer Carole C. Sullivan

CAST

Lillian MARY JANE WELLS
Joanna MAUREEN KERRIGAN
Windsor TERRY HINZ
Kelly MEREDITH BARNETT
Mildred/Rotary Lady BEVERLY COSHAM
Nobody LAFONTAINE OLIVER

DO NOT GO GENTLE

**A Play in Two Acts
For 2 Men and 4 Women**

CHARACTERS

LILLIAN BARRON 84 years old, recently deceased
JOANNA late 30s, Lillian's niece
WINDSOR mid-40s, Lillian's son
KELLY 13 years old, Lillian's granddaughter
MILDRED FLUMAC professional estate sale organizer
NOBODY 12 years old

SETTING:

**The living room of Lillian Barron's house on the
afternoon before an estate sale.**

TIME:

**January 12, 1991
and various times during the previous 84 years.**

AUTHOR'S NOTE ON SETTING

My vision of the set is fragmentary and non-realistic. A suggestion of the house which is emphatically Victorian, with peaked roofs and a turret or two can be seen. The upper floors are simply indicated in deft lines and, perhaps, bits of gingerbread trim and patches of roof.

Downstairs, the living room is set up for what will be an estate sale of Lillian's goods to take place the next day. The walls are created by panels of scrim material stretched over frames. These walls have been covered by an odd assortment of coverings: blankets, quilts, even large bath towels, giving the place an oddly circus-esque appearance. The floor and visible surfaces of the walls bear traces of swirls and slashes of paint in bright incongruous colors, but no specific images are seen. UC there is a staircase with an ornately carved banister leading to a landing and then to the floors above. UL is an arched doorway leading to the front door. UR there is another archway and a hallway which leads to the kitchen in one direction and a downstairs bedroom in the other. Downstage there is a bay window with a window seat. The window is draped with sheets or towels. There are tables stacked with dishware, kitchen utensils and personal items and several racks of clothing on wheels. In a dominant place is a large winged-back easy chair, the chair that Lillian died in. Nearby is a smaller chair and a table with a large glass ball among the clutter.

ACT ONE

SETTING: *In real time the play is set on January 12, 1991, in the living room of Lillian Barron's somewhat dilapidated house in University City, an older section of St. Louis. At the moment, the stage is in darkness.*

AT RISE: *LILLIAN appears in a spotlight. She sees someone out front and shouts.*

LILLIAN. Get away from my fence! Young man, that word is spelled with a "K" and damn has an "N" in it. You've got no future as a vandal if you can't even spell your swear words correctly. Now, damn is D-A-M-N. (*Blackout.*)

(There is the sound of a clock chiming and then a telephone ringing in the darkness. A tight pin spot comes up on JOANNA.)

JOANNA. I knew that she was dead when she didn't answer the telephone. It rang, and rang, and rang, and I just knew.

(A pin spot comes up on KELLY who wears a cap or beret.)

KELLY. It was the sound of the clock chiming that woke me up, like a voice calling to me, and then I heard the phone ringing and then the ringing stopped.

(Phone stops ringing. A pin spot comes up on WINDSOR.)

WINDSOR. When I heard that she was dead, it was like someone hit me in the chest with a shovel.

(The clock stops chiming. A pin spot comes up on LILLIAN sitting in her chair.)

LILLIAN. When I realized I was dead, I laughed out loud, took a deep breath of pure light, and stepped out of my body.

JOANNA. I found her in the living room, sitting in her chair, her brushes were still in her hand.

LILLIAN. Five more minutes, I just needed five more minutes...maybe ten.

KELLY. So, my parents came in and sat on the edge of my bed and told me...

WINDSOR. Kelly, your grandmother is dead.

KELLY. ...and then my brother Justin, he's four, woke up and said, "What's the matter with Grambie?" and Dad said...

WINDSOR. She died, son...

KELLY. ...and Mom said, "She's gone to heaven to live with God," and Justin said, "So when did God die?"

LILLIAN. That poem by Dylan Thomas kept running through my head...

WINDSOR. I've got 48 hours emergency leave for the funeral.

LILLIAN. "Do not go gentle..."

KELLY. I'm going too, I'm going with you.

LILLIAN. "...into that good night."

KELLY. I never knew anyone who died.

LILLIAN. My last words, and they weren't even my own!

JOANNA. The funeral was lovely...

WINDSOR. ...a total blank...

KELLY. ...really weird.

LILLIAN. When you die, isn't something big supposed to happen?

KELLY. All the time I had this creepy feeling like somebody was watching me from the shadows.

LILLIAN. A blinding light? A tunnel? Celestial voices? Something?

KELLY. I'd catch a glimpse...I'd turn my head...nobody!

WINDSOR. All the time I kept thinking, I'm nobody's child. I'm nobody's child anymore.

LILLIAN. Why am I still here? (*Lights out on WINDSOR, JOANNA, and LILLIAN.*)

KELLY. After the funeral, Dad said we had to fly right back to the base in Germany, on account of the fact that the United States was just about to go to war, but first we had to take care of Grambie's house.

(Light out on KELLY. There is a beat of darkness. Dim lights come up on the living room. NOBODY is seen as a shadowy figure coming down the stairs in the semi-darkness. He stops on the landing and looks around.)

NOBODY. Is there anyone here?

JOANNA (*off-stage*). I've got the key.

(NOBODY bolts upstairs just as a sharp angle of light with three shadows floods the stage; as if a door had opened suddenly into a pitch black room.)

JOANNA. I'll get the light. Now, Windsor, don't blow your stack when you see this.

WINDSOR. See what?

JOANNA. This.

(Lights come on suddenly and brightly, revealing the chaos of the room. LILLIAN sits in her chair, unseen and unheard by the other characters except in flashback. LILLIAN will remain on-stage throughout most of the play, but the set should be designed so there are places among the boxes, or in the angles of the walls of the room, where she may sit and watch the action and seem to disappear. But for now, she sits and watches as if slightly confused.)

LILLIAN. So, here you are. Here you all are!

(KELLY, JOANNA, and WINDSOR, enter wearing coats, etc. KELLY still wears her cap or beret which she does not take off as everyone sheds their coats.)

WINDSOR. What the...

KELLY. Wow!

JOANNA. See?

LILLIAN. I can see you, but your edges are a little blurry.

KELLY. The walls, they're covered with blankets and towels and stuff.

LILLIAN. Oh, Kelly, Kelly, my girl. You were just a baby... no, that's not right.

JOANNA. I asked Mrs. Flumac, the estate sale lady, to do it.

LILLIAN. Joanna, you look so sad. You shouldn't look so sad.

KELLY. There's a thunderstorm painted on the ceiling... clouds, rain, lightning...

WINDSOR. What's all this paint on the floor?

LILLIAN. And, Windsor, you look so old. You can't be that old.

JOANNA. That's what I was trying to tell you. There's stuff painted all over the walls.

LILLIAN. Time's all in pieces, all jumbled up!

JOANNA. Bombs exploding, people shooting, planes crashing...

KELLY (*peeking under a cover*). Hey, there's a picture under this cover, painted right on the wall. Looks like a huge mushroom cloud.

LILLIAN. Why is it covered? It shouldn't be covered.

JOANNA. Windsor, some of these pictures are pretty horrific. I told Mrs. Flumac to cover the paintings as best she could. She should still be here...Mrs. Flumac?

KELLY. And there's a skeleton in the closet.

WINDSOR. Are they all over the house?

LILLIAN. Yes.

JOANNA. I don't know. When I let myself in it was dark; there were paramedics all over the place. I was more concerned about your mother than looking at pictures.

KELLY. Over here the floor has a big crack in it and it's painted to look like molten lava's pouring out...Cool! (*KELLY exits through the UR archway.*)

WINDSOR. How long has it been since you were over here?

JOANNA. Not for a while, quite a while. After Sam left, things got a little complicated.

LILLIAN. You came whenever you could.

JOANNA. I came whenever I could.

KELLY (*still exploring*). You guys should see the downstairs bathroom.

WINDSOR. How long?...weeks, months?

JOANNA. But I called...

LILLIAN. You called me everyday!

JOANNA. ...I called her everyday.

KELLY. There are alligators in the bathtub, a shark in the sink...

JOANNA. Mrs. Flumac! Are you here?

KELLY. There are piranhas painted all over the toilet.
(*KELLY crosses to the UL archway.*)

WINDSOR. If there was something going on here, you should have let me know!

JOANNA. I didn't know myself! Windsor, she was your mother!

WINDSOR. And she was your *aunt* and you live right here in St. Louis.

KELLY (*lifts a drape so that WINDSOR and JOANNA can see what is underneath but not the audience*). Oh, gross. There's a picture here of someone getting shot in the head. It's a kid!

JOANNA. That's the first one I saw. That's why I asked Mrs. Flumac to cover them up. (*WINDSOR and JOANNA cross to the hallway. They look at the picture.*)

WINDSOR (*softly*). Oh, my Lord.

KELLY. There's another kid pointing a gun at him.

JOANNA. Tomorrow, everybody in the neighborhood will be over here for the estate sale. Is this the first thing you want them to see when they walk in the door?

KELLY. Gross.

LILLIAN. Look at the fear, give it a shape...

WINDSOR. Cover it up, Kelly.

LILLIAN. No! Don't!

KELLY. Why?

WINDSOR. Because I said so!

KELLY (*replaces the cover. Indicating her cap*). Can I take this thing off now?

WINDSOR. Do you have to?

KELLY. It gets itchy when I wear it indoors. It was driving me crazy all during the funeral. I don't see why I had to wear it anyway.

WINDSOR. Considering the occasion, I should think that answer would be fairly obvious. (*KELLY removes her hat and reveals her hair which is cut short and spiky and is bright purple in color.*)

KELLY. That old lady playing the organ had blue hair.

WINDSOR. That is quite a different matter.

KELLY. Why?

WINDSOR. It just is.

KELLY. Well, nobody can see me here.

WINDSOR. I can see you.

KELLY. Dad! (*She turns to face JOANNA and also faces the unseen LILLIAN.*) So, Aunt Jo, you still haven't told me what you think about my hair.

JOANNA. Well, it certainly is...

WINDSOR (*under his breath*). Ridiculous!

JOANNA. Unusual.

LILLIAN. Marvelous!

JOANNA. Mrs. Flumac has got to be here somewhere. Windsor, you look down in the basement and I'll check up the back stairs. Mrs. Flumac!

WINDSOR. Just do me a favor, Kelly. Keep the cap on, okay? It's been a rough day. (*JOANNA exits in one direction, WINDSOR, in another. KELLY ruffles her hair, catches sight of herself in the mirror, sticks out her tongue at her own reflection, and jams the cap back on her head. LILLIAN watches her.*)

KELLY. Gross!

LILLIAN. Kelly. Oh, Kelly, my girl.

(*KELLY turns as if she's heard something. JOANNA enters.*)

KELLY. Did you say something?

JOANNA. No. She's got to be here; I saw her car out front.

(WINDSOR enters.)

WINDSOR. She's not down there.

JOANNA & WINDSOR *(calling)*. MRS. FLUMAC!

(MILDRED appears at the top of the staircase.)

MILDRED. Here I am! I was in the attic! Colonel Barron, permit me to offer my sincerest sympathy. I am looking after your mother's estate sale. Mildred Flumac, M.C.

WINDSOR. M.C.?

MILDRED *(as she descends the stairs)*. Merchandising consultant! Estate sales, garage sales, moving sales, no sale is too big or too small, I do them all: pricing, sorting, advertising, put up signs, take them down, watch the customers, make change, take checks, all for just the tiniest percentage of the total. I turn garages into gold mines and trash into treasure. *(She hands him a business card.)* As you will see, I have followed your instructions to the letter! The walls are now covered with the contents of the linen closet, a very wise idea indeed. You certainly don't need any more talk in the neighborhood about your mother, God rest her soul.

WINDSOR. More talk?

MILDRED. Your mother had a bit of a...reputation.

WINDSOR. A reputation for what?

MILDRED. After she painted the windows with thousands of eyeballs people got a little...well, curious.

WINDSOR. My mother did all this painting?

MILDRED. I assume so.

WINDSOR. But she was 84 years old!

JOANNA. She always painted. She even took those classes over at the Y.

LILLIAN. Dead pictures of dead fruit. Still lite? That's not life!

WINDSOR. Yeah, but she always used a canvas.

MILDRED. Your mother was a very unusual woman.

WINDSOR. You knew her?

MILDRED. Knew of her...everyone in the neighborhood did.

Last month, after she painted her mailbox to look like a boa constrictor, even the mailman got a little...unnerved every time he put the mail in its mouth.

WINDSOR. Why would she paint on the walls?

MILDRED. It's all over the house, in the hallways, up the stairs, even the straight-backed chairs in the kitchen are painted to look like people are sitting in them.

WINDSOR (*incredulous*). I can't believe my mother did all this!

MILDRED (*ignoring his question*). But, never fear, I have arranged for a team of painters to come in here to slap down a coat of flat white latex, over the whole interior of the house.

LILLIAN. No!

MILDRED. I have every hope that they are on their way here, even as we speak.

LILLIAN. Not before you've seen...

MILDRED. God knows I have left a million messages on their answering machine.

LILLIAN. Not before you know.

MILDRED. But you know painters, they are not really of this earth; I think it's the fumes.

(*KELLY enters from the kitchen.*)

KELLY. This is like a whole house covered with tattoos!

WINDSOR. Mrs. Flumac, this is my daughter, Kelly.

KELLY. Hello.

WINDSOR. Joanna, do you know if Mother had a TV anywhere around here?

JOANNA. There used to be one upstairs.

WINDSOR. I just hope we can get CNN.

KELLY. Dad wouldn't want to miss a minute of the war.

WINDSOR. We are not at war, Kelly.

KELLY. Not yet.

MILDRED. So, Colonel Baron, are we going to war with Iraq?

WINDSOR. That all depends on the Congress and the President.

MILDRED. All day yesterday, the newscasts kept interrupting my soap operas. I certainly hope Congress makes up its mind pretty soon.

JOANNA. I just wish they'd stop forecasting troop casualties.

WINDSOR. The war hasn't even started yet and they are burying us by the battalion.

KELLY. CNN, CNN. That's all anyone listens to, even in Germany! This is CNN! Dum ta da DUM DUM!! I hate that music!

WINDSOR (*to KELLY*). Check out the TV upstairs.

KELLY. Can't we just forget the war...

WINDSOR. Come on, Kelly!

KELLY. ...for just one day!

WINDSOR. Hop to it!

KELLY (*snaps to attention*). Yes, sir! Colonel Barron, sir!
(*KELLY exits upstairs.*)

MILDRED (*crosses to WINDSOR*). Colonel Barron, in addition to the pictures there is also some writing on the walls.

WINDSOR. Writing?

MILDRED. Sometimes just letters, sometimes whole words and phrases. Nothing that makes much sense. Would you like to see?

LILLIAN. Yes!

WINDSOR. No. I've seen quite enough already. I've seen enough to know that before she died, my mother went off the deep end and...

MILDRED. Now, that's all water under the bridge and we have much to do before the thundering hordes come pounding through this door bright and early tomorrow morning for the sale. You will all need to sort through these boxes and set aside anything of sentimental value that you might wish to keep. Otherwise, I shall consider everything here fair game.

WINDSOR. Sell everything.

MILDRED. Then we shall all need to get busy with the pricing! (*MILDRED exits through the hall doorway.*)

JOANNA. Windsor, you should sort through these boxes.

LILLIAN. Things, so many things!

WINDSOR. Take anything you want, Joanna, but sell the rest.

LILLIAN. Too many things!

KELLY (*from upstairs*). The mirror in the upstairs bathroom has a bunch of noses painted all over it!

WINDSOR. Kelly, just find the TV, please!

JOANNA. But there might be something you want to remember.

LILLIAN. So many memories.

WINDSOR. I haven't got time for memories now. At exactly 2100 hours Kelly and I have got to be on that plane back to...

JOANNA. Windsor, your mother just died, surely people will understand...