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*Dramatic Publishing*



# **A TIME TO GO HOME**

**A Drama in One Act**  
**by**  
**G.M. (BUD) THOMPSON**



**Dramatic Publishing**

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(A TIME TO GO HOME)

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# A TIME TO GO HOME

A Drama in One Act

For 13 male, 13 female, doubling possible/flexible casting

## CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

FIRST FUNERAL HOME ATTENDANT

SECOND FUNERAL HOME ATTENDANT

\*STEPHANIE HAMMELL a bit more mature than the others

\*DAVID CHANEY . quiet, his thoughts and feelings run deep

\*EARL WILLIAMS . . . . . the joker of the group

\*JENNIFER GALLAGHER . . comes across self-centered, hard

MR. CHANEY . . . . . Dave's dad

MRS. CHANEY . . . . . Dave's mom

THE GIRLS (4, approximately Jennifer's age)

THE GUYS (4, approximately Earl's age)

HUGH ARAJERK . . . . . TV game show host

CAROL . . . . . Hugh's assistant

APPLAUSE CARD HOLDERS (2)

HE	}	teenagers at David's church
SHE		
HIM		
HER		

MRS. HAMMELL . . . . . Stephanie's mom

MRS. GALLAGHER . . . . . Jenny's mom

MR. WILLIAMS . . . . . Earl's dad

MRS. WILLIAMS . . . . . Earl's mom

\*These four are teenagers. It is possible to cast any of them anywhere within that age range, although it should be remembered that too wide an age span would negate the idea that they would be sitting together on a bus.

**OFF-STAGE VOICES**

**RADIO ANNOUNCER**

**TV REPORTER**

**TV GAME SHOW ANNOUNCER (JOHNNY)**

**THE TIME: The Present.**

**THE PLACE: The Sanctuary of a Church.**

## CHARACTER NOTES

**STEPHANIE HAMMELL:** She has thought through some things, wrestled with some issues, made some decisions about who she is and wants to be. She does not see herself as being better than others; she is just at peace with herself and with those around her. She and David are the points of stability for the group.

**DAVID CHANEY:** He is quick to comfort the hurting and try to help those in trouble. Although he is clearly a nice guy and good friend, there is something in his life he hasn't figured out yet and is struggling to understand. His constant inner reflection is the basis for his quiet detachment.

**EARL WILLIAMS:** His humor is tinged with sarcasm, and serves him mostly as a defense mechanism. While he IS the comic relief, his realizations during the play are perhaps the most tragic. He is a complex character, operating on many, often contradictory, levels at once. His humor is a means of hiding his sadness, his brash behavior a means of dealing with his insecurity.

**JENNIFER GALLAGHER:** She firmly believes she understands how life works, and that anyone who doesn't share that understanding is either a fool or deluded. But it comes from a life-style she has been given, and mixed in with her judgmental superiority is a gnawing fear that perhaps she is wrong.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*A TIME TO GO HOME* was originally produced and performed as *SHADOWS* by the Highland Presbyterian Church Youth in Fayetteville, NC, for whom it was written as a means of exploring the issues addressed. Performances took place April 27, 28, 29, 1990, under the direction of the author. This production was staged in a major sanctuary, having a virtually unlimited budget. Youth ages 12-15 performed all on-stage roles.

The script was subsequently produced and performed by the St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church Sr. High Youth in Davison, Michigan, March 22 and 23, 1991, under the direction of Mr. Doug Hansen and the author. This production took place in a small sanctuary, having virtually no budget. Youth ages 15-18 performed all on-stage roles, except those of the parents, who were played by adults.

Most recently, *A TIME TO GO HOME (SHADOWS)* was produced and performed by the Eastminster Presbyterian Church Sr. High Youth in Grand Rapids, MI, April 23, 24, 25, 1993, under the direction of the author. This production was staged in a modest-sized sanctuary and was supported by a free-will offering and private donations, which covered the cost of production and generated an extra \$200 toward the youth summer mission trip. Youth ages 15-18 performed all on-stage roles.

References on the producability of the script, educational and community building dynamics realized by both youth and church, and the success of the performances are available upon request.

## A TIME TO GO HOME

**AT OPENING:** *The house lights should be brought down and the audience left in as much darkness as possible. Allow them to sit in silent darkness for a few seconds. Slowly, we should hear the SOUNDS of the interior of a school bus: the dull roar of the engine, the commotion of a full load of students (Note: Be sure it is the sound of Jr./Sr. High students, as opposed to younger elementary. Your audience will know the difference.) Suddenly, we should hear the sounds of screeching tires, screams of alarm, and the unmistakable sound of a metal-hitting-metal auto crash. Screaming of pain and shock fades to:*

**RADIO ANNOUNCER** (*offstage*). Tragedy struck this afternoon when a local school bus filled with students was struck broad-side by a passenger car just before 4 p.m. Four students are dead and several others injured. The driver of the car received minor injuries. The car apparently ran a stop sign, striking the side of the bus while it was transporting the children home from school. While no names have been released by the police, it is known that the driver of the car was intoxicated at the time of the accident. In other news today, city officials denied allegations that...(*Fade out and fade in:*)

**TV REPORTER** (*offstage*). Roger, I'm standing here live in front of the Chaney home. As you know, David Chaney was one of the four teenagers killed this afternoon in that



tragic bus crash. We expect David's father, Matt, to return home at any minute and we hope to get his reaction to all of this...There's his car now. (*Sounds of a car pulling into the driveway, stopping, car door opening, closing.*) Mr. Chaney, would you care to tell us what you're thinking?

MR. CHANEY (*offstage*). Please...not now! I need to be with my wife...

TV REPORTER (*offstage*). Mr. Chaney, do you think you'll file criminal charges against the drunk driver?

MR. CHANEY (*offstage, angrily*). Just leave us alone, please! (*Sound of slamming door.*)

TV REPORTER (*offstage*). A very hard time for everyone, I'm sure. For News Eye 6, I'm Deborah Genesee.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (*offstage*). A joint funeral service for the four students killed earlier this week in that school bus tragedy will take place this evening at 7 p.m. in the sanctuary of First Church downtown. The joint service for the four is being held at the request of their families. Mrs. Caroline Hammell, mother of Stephanie Hammell, said that the service will celebrate their friendship and help all those who loved them to comfort each other during this time of loss. Memorial gifts should be sent to Students Against Drunk Driving at the local or national levels.

(*During this last part of the soundtrack, the lights come up on the stage, revealing the four coffins positioned for the funeral service. Two FUNERAL HOME ATTENDANTS, dressed in dark suits, are putting the last touches on the scene.*)

FIRST ATTENDANT (*looking at his watch*). It's almost time. We'd better go. Are you finished yet?

SECOND ATTENDANT. Yeah, in a second. (*Straightening the flowers on one of the coffins.*) Ya know, for all the times we do this, services for kids still get to me. It's so sad. (*FIRST ATTENDANT feels it too, but they have a job to do. He puts a hand on his partner's shoulder.*)

FIRST ATTENDANT. Come on, let's go. (*ATTENDANTS exit.*)

(*A pause, as if the room is empty. Simultaneously, STEPHANIE, DAVID, JENNIFER, and EARL enter from different directions, acting very surprised to be here and not sure of what is happening. They are each wearing a tie-dye T-shirt, full of bright colors and bold patterns; each different from the other and yet alike somehow. They are also wearing blue jeans and are barefoot. They are wearing no jewelry or fashion make-up. ALL slowly move toward a point C. While they are moving, they share the following:*)

STEPHANIE. Where are we?

DAVID. I think we're in my church.

EARL. How did we get here?

JENNIFER. The last thing I remember is the bus. Something terrible was happening. Everybody was all excited and screaming and stuff. I don't remember anything after that.

DAVID. There...there was a car. I turned to look at what everyone was pointing at, and I saw it...just for a split second...then everything went dark. (*By this time, STEPHANIE has cautiously moved over to one of the coffins. With a mixture of fear and curiosity, she opens it and looks in.*)

STEPHANIE (*with surprise and terror*). Oh my...(She covers her mouth in shock. The OTHERS, who have not yet looked at the coffins, run over and look in. They are still and silent.)

DAVID. Stephanie...it's you.

EARL. And you don't look well at all. *(He chuckles to himself. The OTHERS glare at him.)* Hey, c'mon...lighten up! It can't be Steph. Look: she's right here. And we're right here with her. I mean, granted, that looks a lot LIKE Steph, but it's gotta be just a coincidence. The chances of this being Steph here...*(He points to STEPHANIE.)*...and that being Steph there...*(Points to the coffin.)*...are about as good as this being me here...*(He slaps his chest.)*...and that being me over...*(EARL turns his head away from the group and sees one of the other coffins. The OTHERS also now realize that there are other coffins. A pause as reality dawns on them, then they rush to look in the other coffins, each discovering his/her own.)*

JENNIFER. We're dead! We died on the bus! That's why everything was dark.

DAVID. That car must have hit us. We must have been killed in the wreck.

EARL. This is nuts. We can't be dead. There wasn't any pain. There isn't any pain. I don't feel dead.

STEPHANIE. And just what is being dead supposed to feel like?

EARL. It's supposed to feel...cold...and, I dunno, dark...and alone. *(During the last exchange, JENNIFER's anger and grief have been building. By now, she is losing control. She begins to yell and cry, pounding the coffin with her fist.)*

JENNIFER. I can't be dead! It's not fair! I'm too young to be dead! It's not fair! I want to get to live like everybody else! I can't be dead! I can't! I'm not done with my life yet! It's not fair...*(DAVID comes over and restrains JENNIFER from beating the coffin. She struggles against him at first, then gives up and gives in to her grief. He turns her around and holds her as she cries.)*

DAVID. No, Jenny, it's not fair.

EARL. But I still don't understand what we're doing here. I mean, if we're really dead, aren't we supposed to be playing harps or dodging flames or something? Somehow I never thought that I'd be hanging around First Church. If we're going to have to hang around somewhere, couldn't we have at least ended up at the mall?

STEPHANIE. Earl, I think there's a particular reason that we're here. I'm not sure, but I think these are our spirits... like our souls.

EARL. You mean, we're, like, ghosts? Cool!....

*(The two FUNERAL HOME ATTENDANTS come in carrying programs. They begin to put them on the seats on the first pews. As they do, EARL begins hovering around them, doing every ghostly, haunting thing he can think of. Despite his best efforts, the ATTENDANTS are unaware of him and leave when their job is done. EARL watches them go, dejected.)*

EARL. This being dead stuff isn't going to be any fun at all.

STEPHANIE. Earl...

EARL. I should have watched *Beetlejuice* more. That couple had this same problem. There's supposed to be a book around here somewhere...*(He begins pacing around the stage, looking for the book.)*

STEPHANIE. Earl...

EARL. I remember! You start by drawing a door...*(He turns to go draw the door and STEPHANIE grabs his arm.)*

STEPHANIE *(frustrated)*. Earl, stop it! We're not going to the mall, we are not a "haunted house" item out of the *National Enquirer*, and a team of Hollywood special effects people are not going to make this entertaining for us. Now, I don't understand what's happening to us, but what-

ever it is, we're going to have to figure it out and deal with THAT, and not pretend like this is some movie.

EARL (*his fear showing*). Well, I *want* it to be some movie! I want it to be something I read or something I saw. I want it to be something I know...so I'll know what to do...or at least what's going to happen next. I'm really scared, Steph. Really scared.

STEPHANIE. I know, Earl. We all are.

EARL. You know what scares me the most?

STEPHANIE (*being the helping friend*). No, what?

EARL. I'm really scared that I'm going to have to wear this outfit for all of eternity. (*DAVID and JENNIFER laugh, STEPHANIE realizes she has played the straight-person.*) Excuse me, but *tie-dye*? With my luck, the here-after will turn out to be a great, cosmic hippie commune.

JENNIFER (*looking at the shirt*). I kind of like them. Besides, what choice do we have?

EARL. I suppose. But I'll tell you one thing, when I was alive, I wouldn't have been caught dead in this. (*The OTH-ERS glare at him again.*) Sorry. I just hope that, somewhere along the way, we get a change of...aura...or karma...or whatever this is. (*STEPHANIE has moved to one of the front pews and picked up one of the programs that were placed there.*)

STEPHANIE. This may have something to do with why we're here.

DAVID. What is it?

STEPHANIE. A bulletin for our funeral service. It's supposed to be tonight at seven.

JENNIFER (*looking over audience to the back wall of the sanctuary*). It's almost seven now.

EARL. So they'll all be here any minute...

DAVID. Mom and Dad...

JENNIFER. Our friends from school...

STEPHANIE. The people from church...

EARL (*walks over to his coffin and points at it*). And they're going to see me dressed like *this*? My mother *knows* I hate that suit. I look like a dork in that suit! I am so embarrassed, I could just...(The OTHERS glare at him again.)  
Never mind.

JENNIFER. Do we have to be here when they come? Can't we go somewhere and wait till it's over?

STEPHANIE. Don't you *want* to see them again?

JENNIFER. Not like this...not like some...shadow...that hangs on the wall or lurks in the corner. I want to see them again if I can talk to them and laugh with them and hug them. I want to see them again if we can have the chance to do something more with our time together. We spent so much of it on stupid, pointless stuff. But to just *see* them...

DAVID. I know what she means. There are some people I'm really gonna miss, but there are others that...well, I dunno...it's like you owe them something; some part of yourself that you were too embarrassed or too proud or too busy to give. So you never did. You told yourself you would...someday. No rush...I've got all the time in the world.

EARL. We *did* have all the time in the world. It just got repossessed by some drunk guy with a car.

JENNIFER. No, I don't want to be here. It'll be too hard.

DAVID. My mom is gonna *cry*. Oh, man. She's gonna be a regular Niagara Falls when she gets here. She always cries over stuff like this. Even old movies and mushy cards will get her going. (*Pauses, thinking.*) But lately, I guess it's been me that's been getting her going...

*(During this last part, MR. and MRS. CHANEY come on and set up a small kitchen table with three chairs. Once in position, they freeze until DAVID completes his line, at which time the lights come up on them and DAVID walks into the scene, reliving the memory. Lights on the Chancel area go down and the OTHERS freeze where they are.)*

DAVID. Hi. Sorry I missed dinner. Did anybody call for me?

MR. CHANEY. David, where have you been?

DAVID. I was over at Jason's. A bunch of us went over there after school and then his mom invited us to stay for dinner.

MRS. CHANEY. Well, you could have called and told us. We've been worried sick.

DAVID. I tried to call, but the line was busy. I guess I forgot to try again. If you'd've called over there...

MR. CHANEY *(very angry)*. It is *not* our responsibility to call all over town looking for you! It is your responsibility to be at home when you are supposed to be at home or, at the very least, let us know where you are.

DAVID. Hey, well, I'm sorry! I didn't think it was that big a deal. Next time I'll rent the Goodyear blimp, OK?

MR. CHANEY. Don't get smart with me...

MRS. CHANEY. David, it's just that we worry about you...

DAVID *(angrily, full of sarcasm)*. Well, don't worry about me, OK? I'm sixteen years old and I can take care of myself. I'm not a little baby you have to worry over anymore. None of the other guys had to call and check in with their mommies. Do you have any idea how embarrassing it is to have to do all this kindergarten stuff in front of my friends? Do you?

MR. CHANEY. We don't care how it looks to your friends. We only care about you.