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# TODAY I AM!

**Five Short Plays  
About Growing Up Jewish**

By

SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER

*One Foot After Another*  
*David's Star*  
*The Heart of Buchanan*  
*Wrestling With Angels*  
*Frank and Stein*



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Five Short Plays About Growing Up Jewish)

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For Rabbi Jack Paskoff  
and Temple Shaarai Shomayim—  
congregation, family and friends

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## Frank and Stein

Adapted from the story by Eve B. Feldman  
in *With All My Heart, With All My Mind*  
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### CHARACTERS:

BEN STEIN . . . . . a 13-year-old boy  
SIDNEY . . . . . his younger sister, about 8 or 9  
MOM  
DAD

TIME: The present; before, during, and after Ben's bar mitzvah.

PLACE: In and around Ben's house. May be played on bare stage with minimal set pieces.

Approximate playing time: 20 minutes

## Frank and Stein

AT RISE: *LIGHTS* come up on BEN, seated at a desk DR, facing the audience. He is holding a large diary and pen. The rest of the stage is dark. A table piled high with invitation response cards, notes of various kinds, lists, receipts and a telephone is at left, along with one or two chairs.

BEN. My name is Benjamin Stein. Okay, Benjamin Milton Stein. *(He grimaces, not pleased with the name.)* My family calls me Benjy. Kids in school call me Stein. *(Indicates diary.)* This is Frank. My new diary. Some great-aunt of my mom's sent it to me as a bar mitzvah gift. It's not the worst gift I've gotten. It's sort of a three-way tie between Frank, cufflinks with my initials on them, and some nine-hundred-pound book in Hebrew that I can't understand. Sure I studied Hebrew in Hebrew school and I'm learning my part for my bar mitzvah. But a whole book in Hebrew? Who are we kidding here? The words don't even have vowels in them! You're supposed to figure out what it says by the letters that *are* in it and the context. *(Beat.)* "Context" is a vocabulary word this year. My English teacher is big on vocabulary. "Frank" is also a vocabulary word. Meaning "honest" or "open." So I figured, if I actually wrote something in a diary, it should be frank. *(Beat, regards diary thoughtfully.)* But first, I hated this thing.

*(He rises; LIGHTS come up on MOM and SIDNEY at table, left. MOM is seated, working intently with the papers. BEN moves toward them, holding diary out as if it stank.)*

BEN. I don't want a dumb diary.

MOM *(trying to stay focused on her work)*. Benjy—

SIDNEY. Can I have it, Mom?

MOM. Sidney—

BEN. No, you can't have it!

MOM. Benjy—

SIDNEY. I *want* a diary!

MOM. Sidney—

BEN *(showing her)*. It has *my* initials on it.

MOM *(finally distracted from her work)*. Benjy—

SIDNEY *(snatching diary out of his hands)*. I don't care!

MOM. *Sidney*—

SIDNEY. Please, please, pretty please?

BEN *(grabbing back the diary)*. Never mind. I'll keep it.

*(He strides back toward his desk, leaving MOM exasperated and SIDNEY sidling up to her for a comforting hug. SIDNEY's wail of disappointment fades out as LIGHTS fade. To audience—)* There's something else I should tell you. It's hard, but here goes. There's another reason I decided to write in my diary. We had to read a diary in Hebrew school. It's probably the most famous diary in the world, and it was written by someone about my age—except a girl. Anne Frank. She was hiding in an attic, hiding from the Nazis with her family. She wrote down what happened every day and her thoughts. Parts of it are funny, and parts of it are scary, but it is really, really sad. *(Beat.)* I cried in my head about it. I mean I

managed to keep the tears inside my eyes, but they were still there. I think that's maybe the other reason I named my diary "Frank." For honesty, but for her, too. *(Beat.)* Okay. I don't want to think about that anymore. *(Beat, opens diary and reads as he writes.)* Dear Frank, This bar mitzvah stuff is making me crazy. My mother and father can't seem to talk or think about anything else. My mom has these weird phone calls all day.

*(A phone rings; LIGHTS come up on MOM and SIDNEY at left. MOM, busy shuffling papers, jumps each time the phone rings. SIDNEY lifts the receiver and hands it to MOM. SIDNEY assumes a silly pose each time she handles the phone.)*

MOM. Yes? What? Oh, yes, that will be fine. Thank you. *(As she hands receiver to SIDNEY to hang up—)* The band. *(The phone rings. SIDNEY hands the receiver to MOM.)* No, no, I don't think so. I'll have to check on that. I'll call you back. All right? Thank you. *(As she hands receiver to SIDNEY to hang up—)* The caterer. *(The phone rings. SIDNEY hands the receiver to MOM.)* Oh, yes. I'll make a note of it. Yes, I will. Thank you. *(As she hands receiver to SIDNEY to hang up—)* The balloons. *(The phone rings. SIDNEY hands the receiver to MOM. BEN saunters over, half listening as he picks up one of the lists on the desk and reads the names on it.)* Well, of course. Yes, absolutely. See you there. Mmm-hmm. Thank you. *(As she hands receiver to SIDNEY to hang up—)* The photographer. *(ALL pause for a beat, staring at the phone, anticipating another call, then heave a collective sigh when it doesn't come and*

continue on with the scene.) A moment of silence. How nice.

BEN (*reading from the paper in his hand*). Who are Barney and Louise Mitchell?

MOM. People from Dad's business.

BEN. Why are they invited? I've never heard of them.

SIDNEY. Maybe they've never heard of you, either.

BEN. *Butt out.*

MOM. It's an *occasion*. We want to celebrate and invite all kinds of people. (*She goes back to reading and sorting her papers.*)

SIDNEY. I think we should invite *my* friends, too.

BEN. Oh, *right!* (*SIDNEY sticks her tongue out at him. He sticks his tongue out at her. She makes an ugly face at him. He chases her around the table.*)

SIDNEY (*half giggling and half afraid*). Mom! MOM! MOMMMMMMMMMMMMM! (*MOM sinks back in chair, shaking her head and gazing heavenward, as BEN chases SIDNEY offstage with a shout.*)

BEN. YAAAHHHHHH!

SIDNEY (*offstage, her cries fading in the distance.*)  
MOM! Mom! Mommmmmmm!

(*Satisfied that SIDNEY's gone, BEN crosses stage to his diary. LIGHTS fade on MOM, elbows on desk, head in hands.*)

BEN (*picks up diary and writes—*). Dear Frank, Another gift came in the mail. I fell over laughing. It's a shaving kit! Hah! What I *really* want as a bar mitzvah gift is a golden retriever. (*To audience.*) Not getting one. Sidney is allergic. (*Beat, to audience—*) I went to Jason's bar

mitzvah last week, and the party was at night in a country club. It was hard to tell who were the guests and who were the waiters, because they all wore tuxedos.

*(LIGHTS come up on MOM. BEN joins her.)*

MOM. Tell me everything. I want details. What was the centerpiece?

BEN. What?

MOM. Decorations in the middle of the table.

BEN. Every table had stuff from a different football team.

MOM. A *football* theme!

BEN *(realizing this is important)*. Yeah! Like Andrew had a *bike* theme! Mom! We forgot to find me a theme!

MOM. Not really.

BEN. You picked a theme without asking me?

MOM. Your theme is “Bar Mitzvah.”

BEN. *Everybody’s* theme is bar mitzvah!

MOM. Yes, but we’re not going to cover it up with other themes. We’re trying to keep it *simple* and *warm*. It’s going to be great.

BEN. What if your idea of great and my idea of great don’t match? You like *orange marmalade*!

*(MOM laughs. DAD enters, waving a bill.)*

DAD. Eileen, what are these balloons going to be made of? Gold?

BEN. Hi, Dad.

DAD *(distracted)*. Hi, Benjy. How’s it going? *(Waves bill.)* Eileen?