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Family Plays

CARRIERS

Drama by
Jerome McDonough



CARRIERS

This play will save lives. The fear of AIDS *must* be made stronger than the fear of ridicule and rejection by peers and classmates. *Carriers* can do it.

“I have been a drama teacher and director here at Wilson High for 22 years, and I feel *Carriers* could easily be the most important show I’ve ever directed. I don’t want to lose any of my children, or my students.” (Randy Bowden, Wilson H. S., Long Beach, Calif.)

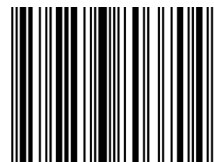
Drama. By Jerome McDonough. *Cast: 10 to 20+ actors, flexible.* The time of this frank, no-punches-pulled play is right now. The place: “So nearby it will scare you to death.” Jerome McDonough calls this “The most tragic and the most desperately needed play I have ever written.” Carriers of sexually transmitted infections are primarily in the 15- to 24-year-old age group. HIV carriers used to be almost exclusively an unknown group that the public did not want to recognize as a problem. Today it may be the kid at the next desk. There is no cure for AIDS—and the best prevention is fear. *Carriers* is a face-the-facts play designed to instill fear in young adult audiences. Without obscenities, but with realistic language, McDonough presents the case against the spread of AIDS forcefully and frankly. *Simple set and costumes.* *Approximate running time: 35 to 40 minutes. Code: CK5.*

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Carriers

CARRIERS

In One Act
by
Jerome McDonough

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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(CARRIERS)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

ABOUT THE PLAY

You can't solve problems by pretending they don't exist. You can't protect your children from the molester on the street until you teach them what a molester is. And you can't stop the rapid spread of AIDS until you make the fear of AIDS stronger than adolescent sex drives and the unbearable fear of being left out of the crowd.

Emotionally secure teenagers firmly believe "It can't happen to me." Emotionally insecure teenagers think, "So what if it happens to me—anything is better than being ignored, rejected, laughed at, scorned."

Perhaps the fear of AIDS will raise the curtain on a happier tomorrow, when virgin marriage and a lifetime of monogamy will again be a source of pride.

There is no cure for AIDS. And the best prevention is fear. *Carriers* is a face-the-facts play designed to instill fear in young adult audiences. Without obscenities, but with realistic language, Jerome McDonough presents the case against the spread of AIDS forcefully and frankly. A few years ago AIDS was considered a disease of homosexuals and intravenous drug users. Today the carrier may be the kid in the next desk.

This play will save lives. Nevertheless, there will be principals, superintendents, school board members who will scream, "NO! You can't present a play like that in my school!" How unaware does an adult have to be to think that today's kids don't know about sex? The problem is that what kids *do know* about sex may not be what they *ought to know*.

In a letter to the editor of a newspaper, a doctor complained that movie theaters refused to run AIDS prevention commercials because they did not want to "make people uncomfortable." The letter continued: "I hospitalized a 19-year-old AIDS patient—a heterosexual who has never used drugs but who started having sex at age 13. I can't help wondering if things might have been different if my patient had seen some of those 'uncomfortable' facts a few years earlier."

We wonder if a high school principal attending the funeral of a former student who died of AIDS might feel a twinge of conscience: "Maybe if my school had warned our students, this poor kid would be alive today."

The fear of AIDS *must* be made stronger than the fear of ridicule and rejection by macho/immoral peers and classmates.

Carriers can do it.

CARRIERS

Cast of Characters

KEELY—A caring friend (Narrator)
ELSON—Another caring friend (Narrator)
GARREN—Teen male (A ladies' man—Genital Warts sufferer)
BEL—Teen female (Herpes sufferer)
ALLAINE—Teen female (Molestation STD victim)
LANGSTON—Teen male (Gonorrhea/Chlamydia sufferer)
MARY LYNN—Teen female (Chlamydia/Gonorrhea sufferer)
NOEL—Late adolescent male (HIV positive gay male)
HANNAH—Teen female (Noel's close friend)
CASSANDRA—Teen female (HIV positive)
FOLEY—Teen male (HIV positive)
DAWN—Teen female (Sex-For-Drugs HIV and STD victim)
ISAAC—Teen male (HIV positive pusher) (May double with Garren)
JANN—Teen female (Compassionate) (May Double with Keely)

ENSEMBLE ROLES

HISTORIANS

TEENS

GIRLS

GUYS

STORYTELLER (May double with Elson)

PAPA CRABS

MAMA SCABIES

BABY TRICHOMONIASIS (TRICH)

OUTALUCK (May double with Foley)

MISS PUBLIC HEALTH

TEACHER 1

TEACHER 2

TEACHER 3

SOCIAL WORKER

Ensemble roles may be doubled by featured performers or cast independently, depending upon the size of the acting pool.

Time

Right now

Place

So nearby it will scare you to death

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

I fervently hope that by the time you read this, **CARRIERS** will be a relic from the days before a cure for AIDS was discovered, that you are reading these words as research on “the way things used to be.”

Today, however, in the summer of 1992, these paragraphs serve as a prelude to what is, at once, the most tragic and the most desperately needed play I have ever written.

A recurring theme of mine for the past 20 years has been the deaths of children. More accurately, the theme has been a cry to end the deaths of children.

But the children keep dying. And now the sort of plagues which were once the province of the mature are invading young lives as well.

The children I speak of have attained the height and, to a great degree, the appearance of adults. But their years span age eleven to the early twenties.

Please, everyone who reads, attends, or performs this play—take its message to heart and act on it. Work to insure that your generations are not among the very last.

Peace and Love.

—Jerome McDonough

Dedication:

To

Dr. Gerald Holman, M.D.

AIDS awareness Zealot and Pioneer.

Medical Advisor for **CARRIERS**

Acknowledgments

Cynthia Thorne, R. N., B. S. N., Department of Health, Amarillo

Dr. Cathy Phillips, PhD., Amarillo V. A. Hospital

Lee Persefield, Texas Department of Health

Dr. Edward Sherwood, Director, Amarillo V. A. Hospital

Members of the Original Cast

Brandy Griffith, Marlene Martinez, Kathi McGreevey, Myia Poindexter, Ami Scalf, Danny Lumpkin, Doug Mietus, Robbie Pillow, Heath Burns, Tina Stratton, Caryann Wheeler, Vern Evans, Jessica Vasquez, Bobby McMillan, and Melissa Calkins

PRODUCTION NOTES

By Jerome McDonough

Props

There aren't many props and most can be pantomimed to facilitate the rapid pace of several sections of the show.

If the decision is made to use real props, however, the "all or nothing" rule kicks in. One possible exception would be the inclusion of actual condoms. You'd better think about that one a long time.

Costuming

Good news. Characters in CARRIERS dress, for the most part, the way teenagers dress every day. The few exceptions are those roles which reflect the drug culture. Sadly, costume models for these latter characters are probably in evidence in your city.

The director makes the final costuming decisions based on appropriateness for character, distinctiveness, and the stage pictures which will be presented, particularly in the final scene. Once costumes have been set, they should remain consistent throughout the production run.

Music

Music opens and closes the play and may be used as a texture during some scenes. Vocal or instrumental selections are suitable for the beginning and ending but instrumental only, at a subdued level, accompanies any speaking.

The proper music for CARRIERS will change at least every year. Selections should reflect the play and enhance the thought-provoking nature of the piece, but "hits" are poor choices since these songs already have other connotations for the listener.

Lesser-known songs by popular artists are a good option. Locally-generated original music is ideal. (Be sure to program-credit all performers and writers.)

Contemporary Christian musical artists can provide a proper "rock" (or rap or country or pop or etc.) feel while reinforcing the positive message of CARRIERS. (There are probably also Contemporary Jewish, Contemporary Native American, Contemporary Arabic, and other religious- and culture-affiliated musical groups as well.) Of course, gaining permission to use any included musical material is appropriate.

Setting

The play may be presented on a bare stage but establishing several areas and multiple levels greatly enhances the visual impact of the show. Touring companies may wish to employ several nesting wooden boxes to provide a quick, portable set.

The original production used a variety of “unit set” elements—step units, platforms, and ramps, arranged as angled runways and larger, raked playing surfaces. The set fanned out from Down Center. Several eight-foot, six-foot, and four-foot pylons were used to supply vertical interest.

Obviously, *CARRIERS* has no given “set.” Each production company should experiment with its own space and circumstances to provide the best environment. This show’s core is not “flash”—it is heart.

Deleting, Cutting, Adapting

Delete words in *CARRIERS*, if necessary, but DO NOT soften its messages. The play is not sugar-coated and an abridgement or cutting should not make it appear so. I have become extremely impatient with the kind of “protecting” of our young people which some factions are fond of pursuing and which by now is endangering those young peoples’ very survival.

As always, I enlist each production company’s help in keeping the piece contemporary. Slang and idiom change, so please reflect those changes in the play. Special care must be taken with language in this script as the line between being allowed to perform and not being allowed to perform is so often drawn by a single word. It doesn’t seem to matter what subjects we address any more so long as our words do not overstep. This is the reason that there is no profanity in Jerome McDonough plays. Keep that choice in mind.

A special case in terminology is the usage of “HIV positive” and “AIDS” as somewhat differentiated terms in this script. As of this writing, the summer of 1992, the American Medical Association was moving toward abandonment of the “HIV positive” term and using “AIDS” to refer to all stages of the disease, not just the final phases. Future production companies need to be certain to reflect correct usage in the presentation.

Another area which will have to be constantly updated is statistics, both in the play and in support materials. Local health departments and/or AIDS support groups will have such information easily at hand.

There are several Christian elements in the play. Permission is hereby

granted to adapt CARRIERS in whatever way necessary to make the script suitable and respectful within any religious or cultural context.

Finally, no permission is given to elaborate, improvise, or expand upon the script. Other or additional material may certainly be presented at the same performance, but it should be outside of the frame of CARRIERS and be program-credited to the author(s) of that material.

Commercial Sponsorship

Groups are encouraged to pursue private, commercial, or corporate sponsorship of a production or a series of productions of CARRIERS. But ALL sources of local and national help must be program-listed, not just those of the sponsoring organization(s). Of course, sponsors may be listed first and receive special recognition.

PERFORMING “DIFFICULT” OR “CONTROVERSIAL” MATERIAL—EVEN IN THE FACE OF UNDERSTANDABLE RELUCTANCE

I travel around quite a bit, speaking and conducting workshops, wearing my playwright’s hat (but clutching my teacher’s one as well). A comment which I often hear from Directors, no matter where I go, is, “We want to do one of your plays, but we live in a very conservative community.” My reaction is, “As far as the interests of our children are concerned, EVERYBODY lives in a conservative community.” In other words, you are not alone.

The truth behind this universal hesitation is simple—all of us—parents, administrators, kids, and teachers—are scared. But we are left with only two choices: 1) Do nothing and hope everything will turn out all right. Or 2) Do something and pray that it makes a difference. All extinct societies followed the first plan. The few surviving societies (including our own, at least for the moment) utilized the second. Taking action has never been more vital.

HOW TO DO SOMETHING

My oldest maxim in this regard, and one I’ve cited before, is: Never surprise anybody. Keep everyone informed all the time.

Directors/Teachers: Take a positive stand when lobbying to produce CARRIERS. Carry the script to your principal or supervisor with a copy of “The CARRIERS Philosophy,” below, as a cover sheet. Add notes of

your own if you wish. Also make a personal appeal when you present the script, being prepared to face some immediate objections. Have nonconfrontational answers ready.

You may be pleasantly surprised by the response. Most states are mandating AIDS and STD education and many school districts have had a hard time finding a starting point. You may be a life saver. Or maybe not. But stay confident.

Once the principal/supervisor gives approval (see how confident I am?), begin sharing the script with others directly involved. (Even if the principal has reservations about the play, beg for permission to proceed with at least one further step.) Call a closed meeting of the parents of the students who will be involved in the production. (Thespian Troupe members, Audition sign-ups, or the advanced Theatre Arts class, for example.) At the meeting, describe the script briefly, then pass out reading copies and an approval form (modeled below). Address immediate gut-reaction questions and responses. (These parents may well prove to be helpful in convincing supervisors, should this still be a factor.)

These hurdles cleared, begin auditions, casting, and rehearsal.

Offer to present “screening” performances of the show for administrators, board members, teachers, and interested adults before any students see the play.

By this point, hesitations about student-audience performances will, hopefully, be minimal. To answer any remaining objections, some schools exclude any student from the performance whose parent or guardian has filed a written disapproval. It is well to honor everyone’s wishes at each stage of the production.

Suitable ages for attendance start at puberty—in other words, about sixth grade. Younger students might be more confused than informed. But each successive higher grade takes a greater and greater chance of being too late.

CARRIERS

[OPENING MUSIC UP, then UNDER.

At rise, prominently positioned onstage TEEN PERFORMERS deliver the AIDS History. An ensemble of other TEENS stands around, sort of listening, various ones responding. (Historians and Teens are identified as 1, 2, 3, etc., simply as a suggestion; any number of Teens and Historians may be used)]

HISTORIAN 1. 1981: The first five AIDS cases are diagnosed, in Los Angeles.

TEEN 1. And?

HISTORIAN 2. Five years later—1986: Over 32,000 AIDS victims to date. Half have died.

TEEN 2. Are you sure you're talking to ME?

HISTORIAN 3. 1991: One million Americans are infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus. Most are unaware of their condition.

TEEN 3. I think I hear my mommy calling.

HISTORIAN 1. 1992: Two hundred thousand U. S. AIDS cases diagnosed to date. Sixty-four percent have died.

TEEN 4. I'm clean and I'm straight. What's your point?

HISTORIAN 2. World-wide, 5,000 people will be infected with the AIDS virus in the next twenty-four hours. That's three victims EVERY MINUTE.

[The next two lines nearly overlap]

TEEN 5. It's a gay problem. Don't you get it?

TEEN 6. It's a druggies' problem. Don't you get it?

[KEELY and ELSON assume their roles as Narrators]

KEELY. It's NOT just a gay problem or a druggies' problem.

ELSON. WHO can get it? Anybody.

TEEN 4. *[Registering a little concern]* Anybody?

KEELY. *[To audience]* Anybody. And here's the worst news—the fastest growing groups of HIV positives are: women and teenagers. *[Concern begins to slowly spread among the skeptical TEENS]*

ELSON. Adult positives run eight males to one female, but in adolescents it's less than two guys to one girl.

KEELY. And they're being infected through male-to-female contacts, the same way they're contracting other sexually transmitted diseases—at the highest rates in history.

ELSON. Now, there's only one perfect way to avoid these dangers. But there are lots of ways to say it—like—

[These lines are delivered by the former HISTORIANS:]

GUY. Don't do it!

KEELY. Or . . .

GIRL. Practice abstinence.

ELSON. Or . . .

GUY. Keep it in your pants!

KEELY. Or . . .

GIRL and GUY. Watch my lips—not my hips.

ELSON. OK, OK, you can watch hips. BUT ONLY WATCH!

KEELY. You could also say . . .

GIRL or GUY. Take cold showers—take them often—take them alone.

[The ENSEMBLE moves offstage, the TEENS and HISTORIANS thinking things over as . . .]

KEELY. *[Gesturing to exiting speakers]* So much for the perfect way to dodge these problems. But imperfection is part of what God built into us—a gift called free will. And He made us hard to convince.

ELSON. AIDS itself is the biggest danger. But other sexually transmitted diseases, if contracted first, open the HIV door even wider.

[BLOCKING NOTE: There are several duet, solo, and small group scenes in the play. Arrange each scene utilizing a unique area or areas of the stage. In this way, characters may re-enter to their former positions for the final scene]

KEELY. Here are some people who might bring things closer to home. You know them—or are them. *[KEELY and ELSON fade from focus as . . .]*

GARREN. [*Striding on, very much in control, very impressed with his looks*] I'm Garren. And you've got to admit it—I look good. Do you know what looking this good gets you? Well—the best tables at restaurants with hostesses, a few extra points from female teachers, all the fine young ladies you could want—plus—warts.

GUY. Warts!?

GARREN. And not the plain “Who's been kissing frogs” models. These are called Genital Warts—caused by the Human Papi-something Virus.

GUY. Whattaya mean, “Genital”?

GARREN. Let me put it this way. If you think warts on your hands are gross, wait until you get them on . . . I don't even want to talk about it. Some girl gave them to me. And by the time I found out, I'd passed them on to several other deserving victims.

GUY. They're easy to get rid of, though, right?

GARREN. [*Sarcastically*] Oh yeah. All you need is this really nasty ointment—if it works. Otherwise they'll have to freeze them off or burn them off with an electric needle or a laser. And if they come back, you get to go through the whole mess again.

GUY. Teenagers hardly ever get those.

GARREN. We're the MOST likely to get them. Man, the next person who tells me these are the best years of my life is going to spend lots of time healing his wounds. [*Exits as BEL enters, speaking*]

BEL. Family is really important to me. I have a bunch of brothers and sisters and I wanted to get married someday and explode the population some more myself. So I started practicing. And trying out helpers. One of them helped me get Herpes. Herpes causes these sores on you—even inside you. You can have them treated and they clear up. But then they come back, as many as half a dozen times a year. Forever. Love-making is out during the flare-ups. And so many things can bring them on—stress—even too much sun. What kind of married life would that be? But what hurts the most is that my babies might get the disease. And Herpes puts me at higher risk for HIV—thirty percent of AIDS mothers have AIDS babies. The Herpes rate is about the same. Could I bring someone into the world knowing that?

I'm glad I have brothers and sisters. Their kids may be the only ones I get to share my love with.

[As BEL exits, the entire ENSEMBLE bursts back onstage]

STORYTELLER. Story Hour! *[ENSEMBLE rushes forward and clusters on the floor, facing the Storyteller, shouting, "Story hour! Story hour!"]* Today's tale is, "Outaluck and The Three Unbearables." Once upon a time there were three little unbearable parasite bugs—Papa Pubic Lice, also called . . . *[ENSEMBLE members take the roles:]*

CRABS. Crabs!

STORYTELLER. Mama Scabies . . .

SCABIES. I'm Scabies!

STORYTELLER. And the tiny baby Trichomoniasis.

TRICH. You can call me Trich!

STORYTELLER. Good. That'll shorten the story. Now each of them had a special place they liked the very best.

CRABS. I stay in the forest.

SCABIES. I burrow down under the surface.

TRICH. And I hide in dark places where nobody can see me.

STORYTELLER. But they all lived together on one young man named . . .

OUTALUCK. *[Looking decidedly uncomfortable]* Outaluck.

STORYTELLER. Outaluck wasn't very careful about some things... like who he—uh—spent time with, whether he kept things clean at his place, and whether he bathed enough—or at all.

CRABS, SCABIES, and TRICH. We hate baths!

STORYTELLER. But he thought everything was OK because . . .

OUTALUCK. The people around me don't bathe much, either.

STORYTELLER. So nobody noticed it. Of course, on those rare occasions when they did come in contact with water, they were sure to leave old-wet towels and clothes and bathing suits and other soggy junk around . . .

OUTALUCK. So we can share everything.

STORYTELLER. And they did.

CRABS. Love those wet towels and bathing suits!

SCABIES. *[Agreeing]* Uh hunh!

TRICH. And I can live outside of the body for SEVEN HOURS!

SCABIES. *[To audience]* We're so proud of him (her).

STORYTELLER. One day Outaluck started to itch.

OUTALUCK. *[As the parasites giggle to themselves]* Ouch.

STORYTELLER. We can't show you where he was itching . . . *[Outaluck turns out, obviously uncomfortable about not being able to scratch]* but it is not a pleasant place to itch. And after he scratched there, he spread the itching to other parts of his body . . . *[turns in and starts to vigorously scratch his head, then both underarms, then starts to reach for his bottom, but . . .]* some of which we can't show you either. *[OUTALUCK goes back to scratching his underarms]*

CRABS. Isn't this fun?

SCABIES. It's so special when families do things together.

STORYTELLER. Then, out of the clinic, leaping to the rescue came . . .

[MISS PUBLIC HEALTH rushes on, looking quite heroic. She introduces herself:]

MISS PUBLIC HEALTH. MISS PUBLIC HEALTH!

CHORUS OF CHILDREN (Ensemble members). Hurray!

MISS PUBLIC HEALTH. Smelly though you may be, Outaluck, I will heal you.

OUTALUCK. Oh, goody.

MISS PUBLIC HEALTH. With creams . . .

CRABS. No!

MISS PUBLIC HEALTH. And lotions . . .

SCABIES. Curses!

MUSS PUBLIC HEALTH. And shampoos!

CRABS AND SCABIES. Oh, cruel fate!

TRICH. You can't get me-ee! Nanny, nanny, nanny!

MISS PUBLIC HEALTH. And the drug, Flagyl . . . *[pronounced "FLAJ-ill"]*

TRICH. Oh-oh.

MISS PUBLIC HEALTH. *[Aside, to audience]* . . . administered under the supervision of a doctor, of course.

STORYTELLER. And the three Unbearables died a horrible, grisly death just like the bad guys in those cheap movies that your parents don't want you to watch. *[The UNBEARABLES sink, dying horrible grisly deaths, saying the words "Horrible" and "Grisly" and "Death" until the STORYTELLER shuts them up:]* So die already! *[They die instantly, arms and legs straight up in the air, "dead cockroach" style]*