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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



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(TODAY I AM!
Five Short Plays About Growing Up Jewish)

ISBN: 1-58342-347-8

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

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TODAY I AM!

Five Short Plays About Growing Up Jewish

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	6
Production History	6-7
<i>One Foot After Another</i> (2w., 1m., 1 boy).	8
<i>David's Star</i> (1m., 1 teen boy, 2 teen girls)	18
<i>The Heart of Buchanan</i> (1w., 4 girls 8-13 yrs.)	28
<i>Wrestling With Angels</i> (1w., 2 teen boys, 2 teen girls) . .	41
<i>Frank and Stein</i> (1m., 1w., 1 teen boy, 1 younger girl) . .	53

These five plays may be performed individually, or in any combination as an evening of one acts. Casts may double in more than one play for even greater flexibility.

Total playing time: about 75 minutes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Special thanks to the authors of the stories on which these plays are based for their generosity and advice: Lois Ruby, Jacqueline Dembar Greene, Carol Matas, and Eve B. Feldman. My gratitude, also, to Rabbi Jack Paskoff, Barry Kornhauser, and members of Congregation Shaarai Shomayim, Lancaster, Pa., who participated in the original reading and offered many helpful comments.

TODAY I AM was further developed through a workshop arranged by Amie Brockway-Henson, Producing Artistic Director of The Open Eye Theater, Margaretville, N.Y. A public reading was held at the Skene Memorial Library, Fleischmanns, N.Y., on Saturday, November 19, 2005, with the following directors and casts:

One Foot After Another
Directed by Amie Brockway

BARRY COHEN Luke Beemer
ALMA ROSEN Marie Palko
PAM Mary Small
KEVIN Thomas Hafner
Stage Directions Garrett Fairbairn

David's Star
Directed by David J. Turan

CARA MATARASSO Mary Small
SAM Thomas Hafner
DAVE Erwin Karl

TAMMY Katie Lehn
Stage Directions Jessica Olenych

The Heart of Buchanan
Directed by David J. Turan

SARAH Alex O'Melia
TRACI Cassie Schmitt
DEE DEE Mary Small
MRS. GOLDSTEIN Jessica Olenych
MOLLY Barbara Morrow
Stage Directions Erwin Karl

Wrestling With Angels
Directed by Amie Brockway

JACI Cassie Schmitt
JOSH Luke Beemer
ISAAC Garrett Fairbairn
BECKY Alex O'Melia
MRS. COHEN Marie Palko
Stage Directions Mary Small

Frank and Stein
Directed by Melissa Cooperman

BEN STEIN Garrett Fairbairn
SIDNEY Alexa Abrams
MOM Sharon Abrams
DAD David J. Turan
Stage Directions Brandon Hargrove

The Heart of Buchanan

Adapted from a short story by the playwright
in *With All My Heart, With All My Mind:
Thirteen Stories About Growing Up Jewish*
Used by permission.

CHARACTERS:

SARAH. an eighth-grader
TRACI her classmate
DEE DEE another classmate
MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Sarah's mother
MOLLY. Sarah's sister, in third grade

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Buchanan Middle School.

Approximate playing time: 15 minutes

The Heart of Buchanan

SCENE 1

TIME and PLACE: *Late morning. A row of lockers in the hallway of Buchanan Middle School. Other lockers display Christmas decorations, but SARAH's does not. May be played in front of closed curtain.*

AT RISE: *SARAH, enters, goes to her locker and opens it. She pulls out her lunch bag, opens it, finds a sack of cookies, selects one and takes a bite.*

TRACI *(enters, making her way across stage to class)*. Sarah!

SARAH. Hi, Traci.

TRACI. On your way to the library?

SARAH. Yeah. In a minute. *(Shows her the cookie and sack.)* My stomach's growling. Want one?

TRACI *(takes a cookie)*. Oatmeal! Thanks! *(As she exits.)* I'll cover for you!

SARAH. Okay. See you there.

(As SARAH fusses with her books, cookie, and contents of her locker, DEE DEE enters and hurries across stage.)

DEE DEE. Hey, Sarah!

SARAH. Hey, Dee Dee!

DEE DEE. Eight more days 'til Christmas break! I can't wait!

SARAH. Right!

DEE DEE. Got your tree up yet?

SARAH (*with forced cheerfulness*). Well...no—

DEE DEE (*without waiting for the rest of SARAH's answer*). Better late than never. See you at choir practice!

(SARAH rolls her eyes, takes another bite of cookie, returns the bag to her locker. MRS. GOLDSTEIN enters, preoccupied with MOLLY, who's been crying.)

SARAH. Mom? What are you doing here?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Sarah! What are *you* doing out of class?

SARAH. I needed a snack. Late lunch is the pits. But never mind me. Is Molly sick?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Not exactly. I got a call from her teacher to come and get her—

SARAH (*notices MOLLY's sniffles; kneels beside her*). What's the matter, Molly? Why the tears? (*MOLLY hangs her head and doesn't answer. To MRS. GOLDSTEIN—*) What's going on?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN (*through clenched teeth*). I am trying very hard not to blow this thing out of proportion. Bear with me. (*A beat, a deep breath, and then—*) "Find your way in," your dad says. The army moves us, we *find our way in*. San Francisco. D.C. Wherever. But I'm afraid this one-horse bump in the road has me beat.

SARAH (*incredulous*). Buchanan?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN (*looks at the lockers*). Well, at least you don't have Christmas decorations on *your* locker.

SARAH. Of course not! What are you talking about?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Shouldn't you be in class?

SARAH. Study hall. I'm in the library. More or less. They never check. Tell me what happened!

MRS. GOLDSTEIN (*another deep breath, and then—*).

Okay. Here goes: Molly's teacher called to inform me that Molly got "a little upset" this morning. Seems the third grade has a play they do every year for the "Christmas assembly." And all the little shepherds, including Molly, are supposed to kneel in front of the manger, and bow their heads to the baby Jesus. A *manger scene* in a third-grade classroom—can you believe it?

MOLLY. What's a "manger scene"?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Those little statues, of Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus.

MOLLY (*nods her head*). Oh. Yeah.

SARAH. So there's a manger scene in their classroom. What's the big deal?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. This is a *public school*. It doesn't belong here.

SARAH. Well, yeah, *technically*, but this is *Buchanan*. We're the only Jews in town. The only non-Christians, as far as I can tell. There are Christmas decorations all over the place.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. I have no problem with that. Homes, shops, whatever. *But not in the public school!*

SARAH (*still not getting it*). I'm singing carols in choir. I've even got a solo!

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Don't remind me.

SARAH. *Mom!* It's just *music*.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. It's *religious* music.

SARAH. Are you telling me I shouldn't do it? Because choir was my "way in" at this school. And singing carols doesn't make me Christian any more than singing *opera* would make me *Italian!*

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. I know, I know. I'm not *telling* you anything.

SARAH. I'm old enough to make my own decisions—

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. *And* old enough to understand what you're doing. *And* you've always been great at "finding your way in." (*Subtly indicates MOLLY.*) But it's not that easy for everyone.

MOLLY (*knowing full well she's being talked about*). I didn't want to bow to the baby Jesus. I'm *Jewish!*

SARAH (*kneels beside MOLLY again; they hug*). Of course, you are, Molly.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. So her teacher tells her to go sit in her seat while the rest of the class rehearses.

MOLLY (*tearing up again*). I didn't want to sit all by myself, either!

SARAH (*sympathetically*). Oh, Molly! Come on, don't cry!

(*MRS. GOLDSTEIN also kneels to comfort MOLLY. MOLLY turns from SARAH and buries her face against her mom's shoulder.*)

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. These people are *educators!* How can a school put an eight-year-old child in this position?

SARAH (*standing*). They don't mean to be hurtful. They just don't get it.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN (*standing*). I don't think they *want* to get it. (*Imitating teacher.*) "I had no *idea* that our Christmas celebration would put *pressure* on your child, Mrs.

Goldstein. Molly is not *required* to participate in our play. She can spend rehearsal time in the second-grade classroom and sit with them while we perform.”
(*Raising her voice, beside herself with fury.*) Wouldn’t *that* be a comfort!

SARAH (*wincing at her mother’s raised voice*). Mom!
Sssshhhh! You’re going to get us *all* in trouble!

MRS. GOLDSTEIN (*lowering her voice*). Sorry.

SARAH. People around here just can’t *imagine* not having Christmas. That’s what my friend Traci said when I told her we don’t have a tree and we don’t go Christmas shopping because *we just don’t celebrate this holiday*: “I can’t *imagine* that!” she said. And she was *really trying!* Everyone else she knows celebrates Christmas.

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. I’m not in charge of what other people can or can’t imagine. I’m in charge of my daughter.

SARAH. So what are you going to do?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Right now, I’m going to take Molly home. And try to calm down. I’ll call and talk to her teacher again in the morning.

MOLLY (*worried*). What are you going to say?

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Well...how about...that maybe you and I could help change the play?

MOLLY (*aghast at the thought*). We *can’t* change the play!

MRS. GOLDSTEIN. Why not?

MOLLY. Because that’s the way they *do* it!

MRS. GOLDSTEIN (*not understanding what that means*).
What?

SARAH. Molly’s right. The whole Christmas assembly is set in stone. The choir’s been singing the same carols in the same order since this school was built. With the