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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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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.

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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

One Foot After Another

Adapted from a short story by Lois Ruby

CHARACTERS:

BARRY COHEN a 13-year-old boy about to graduate
college
ALMA ROSEN a college freshman, 82
PAM. a college classmate of Barry's
KEVIN another classmate

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Near Tully Pond on the campus of Stephen
Hawking University. May be played in front of closed
curtain.

Approximate playing time: 12 minutes.

One Foot After Another

AT RISE: *BARRY is sitting on a bench near Tully Pond. He's writing in a notebook when PAM and KEVIN enter, right, arm in arm. They are very much involved with one another until PAM spots BARRY.*

PAM *(as if speaking to an adorable 5-year-old)*. Oh, look, it's Barry! Hello, Barry!

BARRY *(inserts his pen to mark his page and closes his notebook quickly; he is sensitive to, but used to and tolerant of, PAM's babying)*. Hey, Pam. Hey, Kevin.

KEVIN *(uncomfortable around BARRY and a bit resentful of PAM's affection for him)*. Hey.

PAM *(snuggling in next to BARRY on the bench, to KEVIN's annoyance)*. Whatcha doin', Barry?

BARRY *(covering his notebook with both hands)*. Nothing much. What's up with you two?

PAM. We're heading over to the library. We have to pay our fines.

KEVIN. Yeah. They won't let you graduate if you don't pay up. Can you believe that? Like, *ten bucks*, after all the tuition we've paid!

PAM *(admiringly)*. Not Barry. He's had a totally free ride. *(BARRY nods self-consciously. KEVIN rolls his eyes.)* When are your parents coming, Barry?

BARRY. They're around. They're helping the rest of the family check in at the hotel. *(Troubled by this.)* My mom can't stop weeping.

PAM. Why?

BARRY *(uncomfortable with his mom's overreaction)*. She's so darned proud! My poor dad looks like he's her attendant from the asylum.

(PAM giggles, finding him adorable. Even KEVIN grins begrudgingly. But BARRY's not being funny on purpose.)

PAM. Well, not every mother has a thirteen-year-old graduating from college.

KEVIN. My mom's thrilled I made it before thirty!

PAM. You should hear my dad! I keep telling him six years is *not* that unusual.

BARRY. It's not. And I'm not setting a record or anything. Some kid named Michael Kearney was ten when he graduated. By thirteen, he probably had his doctorate.

KEVIN. Or he crashed and burned.

BARRY. Yeah. It can go either way.

PAM. Maybe that's why your mom's all weepy.

BARRY. Whatever. I needed a break.

PAM. Sure. Parents! So exhausting! *(Nods for a beat, understanding, then—)* Um...Barry?

BARRY. Yah?

PAM. I may not get another chance to talk to you this weekend, with our families here and all, so...hey... *thanks* for getting me through Medieval History. If you hadn't sold me your notes, I never would've made it.

KEVIN *(mumbling)*. Me, neither.

PAM *(surprised)*. You, too?

KEVIN (*hating to admit it, especially in front of her*).

Yeah. Thanks, man.

BARRY. Think nothing of it. Just another service we boy geniuses provide.

PAM (*roughing up his hair and giggling*). You are just the cutest thing! I am really going to miss you! (*BARRY winces and draws back, but that just makes her giggle and fuss over him even more, much to his—and KEVIN's—dismay. She ends by planting a noisy kiss on BARRY's cheek before jumping up to link her arm in KEVIN's. As she and KEVIN exit, left—*) See you at the field house on Sunday. We'll be cheering when they call your name!

BARRY (*grimacing in discomfort and embarrassment and wiping his cheek with his sleeve*). Okay. See ya!

(ALMA enters right, after a beat, wearing a tie-dyed flowing dress and sandals. Her gray hair is braided in a thick rope down her back. She's holding a campus map, crumpled and torn from the many times she's consulted it. She spots BARRY and approaches him.)

ALMA. Excuse me. Would you happen to know where Albertson Hall is? I hate to disturb any of those couples smooching on the grass. Wow! Would you look at that lake! It is romantic, all right. (*Notices BARRY staring at her, flabbergasted.*) Albertson Hall? That's the administration building, isn't it?

BARRY (*finally gets his voice back and points toward a far-off building, back the way she came*). Over there, behind the building with the Miro mural.

ALMA. *Ugh!* I've just come from over there. Who knew this damn campus was so spread out?

(BARRY watches, fascinated, as she sits down beside him and fishes around inside the front of her dress. She pulls out a fake gold case, opens it, takes out a cigar, and offers the case to BARRY, who shakes his head "no" in alarm. She puts the cigar in her mouth, finds a lighter, lights up, and returns the case and lighter to their hiding place inside her dress. She uses the cigar to gnaw on when thinking and to gesture with for emphasis.)

BARRY. Um...are you here for your grandchild's graduation?

ALMA. Oh, please, kid, give me a break. Do I look decrepit enough to have grandchildren that old?

BARRY *(lying)*. I...guess not.

ALMA. No, as a matter of fact, I'm starting school here. I'm a freshman, *trying* to get enrolled for the summer session. You can't start too early, that's my motto. And you?

BARRY. I'm graduating on Sunday.

ALMA *(approving, but not in the least surprised)*. Good for you. Well, as I said, you can't start too early. *(She swipes her sweaty hand down her thigh a time or two and then offers it to BARRY.)* Alma Rosen.

BARRY *(hesitates briefly, then shakes her hand)*. Barry Cohen.

ALMA *(squints at him curiously)*. Jewish?

BARRY. Yes.

ALMA (*delighted*). Imagine! On this whole campus of 12,000 students, a Rosen meets a Cohen coming through the rye.

BARRY (*unaware of the song*). Huh?

ALMA (*singing*). When a Rosen meets a Cohen, comin' through the rye.

BARRY (*doesn't get it, but nods and moves on; he's not thrilled by tomorrow's event—*) Tomorrow's my bar mitzvah.

ALMA (*again, approving, but not surprised*). A two-fer.

BARRY. My parents figured as long as everybody was in town for graduation...

ALMA (*nodding*). You'll be collecting the loot, all right. Unless you've got a bunch of skinflints in your family. Then it's "one gift covers both events."

BARRY. Yeah. It could go either way.

ALMA (*a beat, then—*). Guess when's the last time I was in a synagogue.

BARRY. I don't know. Nineteen twenty-nine?

ALMA. Pretty close. Early thirties. Do the women still sit upstairs?

BARRY. Everyone sits together in mine.

ALMA. Yeah? Jeez, progress. (*Indicating his notebook, still gripped in both hands.*) What's that you're writing, your bar mitzvah speech?

BARRY. No, that's done. (*Pulls a laminated page out of the notebook and pretends to read.*) "I want to thank my parents who had the good sense to marry late and have me in their declining years. And Rabbi Solomon, who kept me fermenting in Hebrew classes for the last four years, even during finals week, because he doesn't believe in genius, or hurrying things along. 'A bar mitzvah