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# **Stay With Me Awhile**

By

MARY E. JOHNSON and  
BARBARA MEANS FRASER

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

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CAST:

Lori Carrell  
Ann Farrell  
Cheryl Frarck  
Annie Landkammer  
Catherine McBride  
Nick Mezacapa  
Savannah Moore  
Thom Nustad

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... Barbara Means Fraser  
Stage Manager ..... Laurie Ackerman  
Technical Director..... Janet Roeder  
Scene Design..... Doug Sween  
Lighting Design ..... Janet Roeder  
Music Composition..... Kevin Dobbe  
Costume Design ..... Marco T. Magno  
Media Director ..... Joel DesLauriers  
Dramaturg ..... Maren Lovgren Moreno  
Graphic Design ..... David Phillips

# Stay With Me Awhile

## CHARACTERS

- ACTOR 1 (w): 40-50 years old.
- ACTOR 2 (w): 50-60 years old.
- ACTOR 3 (w): 60-70 years old.
- ACTOR 4 (w): 18-25 years old.
- ACTOR 5 (w): 35-45 years old.
- ACTOR 6 (m): 60-70 years old.
- ACTOR 7 (w): 18-24 years old.
- ACTOR 8 (m): 45-55 years old.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is based on more than 80 interviews. We are grateful to those who graciously shared their stories.

The play is written to be performed by 8 actors: 2m., 6w.; however, the director may cast as he/she sees fit.

Also consider the following:

- The play needs to move quickly without scene changes or blackouts.
- Make sure you have plenty of entrances and exits.
- The actors need to focus on telling the stories rather than indulging in the feelings.
- A live chime and a few bars of music assist effectively with the transitions.

## SCENES

*(With role distribution)*

Scene 1: Autumn Air

Actor 1

Scene 2: Montage—Introduction

Full Cast

Scene 3: Minnesota Farm Family

Actor 7

Scene 4: War

Actor 4, Actor 6, Actor 8

Scene 5: Montage—Witnessing Death

Full Cast

Scene 6: Auntie Mame

Actor 4

Scene 7: Hail Mary

Actor 2, Actor 3, Actor 4, Actor 6, Actor 7, Actor 8

Scene 8: Dementia

Actor 1, Actor 5

Scene 9: It Was Called GRID Then

Actor 6

Scene 10: Not Dead Yet

Actor 4

Scene 11: Texas Whiskey

Actor 8

Scene 12: Born Too Soon

Actor 3, Actor 6

Scene 13: Montage—Family

Full Cast

Scene 14: My Abuelita

Actor 4

Scene 15: Suicide

Actor 7

Scene 16: Madeline

Actor 2

Scene 17: Montage—Things People Say

Full Cast

Scene 18: Alone

Actor 3

Scene 19: Montage—Alone

Actor 2, Actor 3, Actor 4, Actor 5, Actor 6, Actor 7, Actor 8

Scene 20: Fear of Dying

Actor 1, Actor 2

Scene 21: Occasional Laughter

Actor 4, Actor 7

Scene 22: Henry

Actor 5

Scene 23: Montage—Faith

Full Cast

Scene 24: Brothers

Actor 8

Scene 25: Stairway to Heaven

Actor 6

Scene 26: Montage—At the End

Actor 1, Actor 2, Actor 6, Actor 8

Scene 27: Montage— I Still Miss 'Em

Full Cast

Scene 28: Conclusion

Actor 1



# Stay With Me Awhile

*(Frantic music begins. The ACTORS enter, walking frantically: on phone, with headphones, looking at watch, etc. All going about their active lives. ACTOR 1 walks to C, and others exit.)*

## Scene 1: Autumn Air

ACTOR 1. I was walking down the main corridor of the government building where I worked. Imagine tall, granite columns, leaded windows, polished marble floors. It's a long hallway, and I'd walked it, I don't know, a hundred times.

It was about ten o'clock—on my way to meet with the mayor. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw something that didn't fit—a man slumped over against the wall. He was holding his chest and seemed to be having trouble breathing. I ran to him and yelled for someone to call 9-1-1. But, he put his hand on my arm and said, "Don't call anyone." He held on to me so tightly.

He looked into my eyes and said, "Please stay with me."  
*(Pause.)*

So, I sat down next to him—my back against the granite wall. And, I remember, I put my arm around him. His head was leaning on my chest, and I could smell his cologne and the autumn air clinging to his tweed jacket.

And then, the man moaned softly, slumped against my shoulder, and died.

*(Lights cross fade.)*

## Scene 2: Montage—Introduction

*(ACTORS enter.)*

ACTOR 4. No regrets. No guilt. Nothin' left unsaid.

ACTOR 3. We all thought he was gonna get better. This superman of mine.

ACTOR 5. Long after the funeral, ya know, after the thank-you notes were written, and ah, after all of the casserole dishes were returned, I would, like, lie awake at night wonderin' what my mom was thinkin' in those last hours of her life.

ACTOR 2. By nature, my dad was a giver—not a receiver of care.

ACTOR 8. How do ya tell someone ya love, that it's OK if they die?

ACTOR 6. What I didn't expect, ya know, was, was how hard it was to lose the second parent.

ACTOR 7. It seemed like all humanity and caring had gone out of the world.

ACTOR 1. My dad died suddenly. My mom died after years of suffering. I don't know which is better—or worse.

*(ACTORS 1-6 exit while ACTOR 7 takes her costume item and moves into place. She begins speaking while making final adjustments on the costume.)*

## Scene 3: Minnesota Farm Family

ACTOR 7. Farmers are usually big people—mostly big men. My father was a hulk of a man, lying in a bed that looked too small for him in the cardiac ICU.

Dad was a decisive man. Seed salesmen? No match for him. Implement dealers actually ran and hid when he came around. Even local politicians wanted his endorsement—and, ya know, he'd been chair of the church council more than anybody.

Our family camped out in the hospital waiting room. Every piece of furniture in use. And some were sittin' on the floor or on laps. Kids all over the place—the waiting room smelled like farm cookin'. Two card tables were pulled together and covered with red-and-white checked tableclothes. Crockpots filled with Sloppy Joes and those little cocktail weenies in barbecue sauce. Plastic bowls filled with glorified rice and Cool Whip fruit salads. Tubs of dips and bags of chips. Piles of cookies and bars—with a handwritten sign in front of one pile of cookies that read, "Nuts."

My oldest brother, James, was in charge of the whole scene, except for the lunch. The granddaughters did the spread.

So, James would come out to the waiting room with updates. And every update got a little worse.

We had done this all before—for others in the family. For Grandma. For Aunt Lucy. And little Ashley, born too soon.

James appeared in the waiting room doorway. "If you want to say goodbye you'd better come now." So we organized ourselves, with almost no effort, into groups of four.

When one of my nieces—Emma—approached Dad's bedside, she took his hand, "Grandpa, you won't have to fake those trips to the feed store anymore. You can go right to KFC any time you want now."

Later a young physician in blue scrubs and a wrinkled lab coat walked into the waiting room with my brother, James

and said, “I’m sorry to have to tell you that he has passed.” Silence. All eyes turned to James. “He died,” he said.

And that’s when the mourning began.

*(ACTOR 7 exits as ACTOR 8 enters, ACTOR 7 may put the costume back onto the rack as she exits.)*

#### **Scene 4: War**

ACTOR 8. Took about twenty-four hours to fly from Fort Leonard Wood, near St. Louis, to the MASH unit in Vietnam. I stepped off the cargo plane—bam! The heat, the humidity nearly knocked me over. And the air—God, I could hardly breathe from the smell of sulfur.

I was the surgeon on duty when the young soldier was airlifted in. I arrived ready to cut and fix, ya know, that’s what I do. By the time I got to the ward, white curtains had already been pulled completely around his bed. Normally, this is done when the patient’s already dead. But, in this case it was a courtesy to the others.

He was just eighteen—had been hauling fuel when his load was detonated by sniper fire. The explosion was massive. Even with the swift response of his unit, he was badly burned.

He came to us with deep full-thickness burns over ninety percent of his body. This means burned down to muscle and bone. Only his hands—they’d been covered by protective gloves, and his head—it’d been protected by his helmet—that’s all that was left unburned.

I introduced myself and sat down. *(Sits and faces the audience.)*

“Son, how ya doing?” He replied, “All things considered, sir, I feel fine.” “My name’s Roger,” I said. “I’m a doctor here. What’s your name, son?” “Private Michael Drake, sir,” he replied with surprising enthusiasm. “Well, Michael, I want to talk with you about your injuries.” He nodded his head, still smiling. “Michael, you have been badly burned. Your truck blew up there and the flames . . .” He was confused. “But sir, how could that be? I don’t hurt.” And that’s when, well, he tried to lift his head up but couldn’t. I had to explain, “Your nerves are gone, son. Your body can’t feel pain anymore.”

And he, Michael, he spent several minutes just staring off into space. Then he looked at me and asked, “Sir, what is going to happen to me? Can I go home?” (*Pause.*)

And I said, “Son, you’re going to die.” Michael stared at me, glassy-eyed. “No,” he whispered.” After some time, he asked, “When?” “A few hours,” I said.

(*ACTORS 4 and 6 enter.*)

ACTOR 8 (*cont’d*). Father Caruso, a tough-talking, Italian-American priest from New Jersey appeared along with one of the nurses.

ACTOR 6. Michael, is there anyone you would like to write to—maybe your family, your brothers or sisters, maybe some friends? Michael, this is the lovely Nurse Sheila—she’s going to help you with that.

ACTOR 8. Sheila moved right in—

(*ACTOR 8 stands and offers ACTOR 4 his chair.*)

ACTOR 8 (*cont’d*). And sat down next to Michael—the smell of burned flesh was heavy in the air now—knowing that Michael was likely to lose consciousness sooner rather than later.

ACTOR 4. I asked him, “Michael, how about if we start with your parents? What’re their names and where do they live?”

By the end of an hour, Michael was really exhausted and very short of breath. Morphine was given to ease his breathing, and then, he drifted into unconsciousness. But, in that hour, Michael and I composed letters to his mother and father, his grandfather, and his high-school baseball coach.

ACTOR 8. Private Michael Drake died less than three hours after being evacuated to the field hospital where I worked.

### **Scene 5: Montage—Witnessing Death**

*(ACTORS enter one by one to be in their place as their spot light comes up. ACTORS 4, 6 and 8 will quick change as they are walking.)*

ACTOR 7. The cancer was literally consuming her. Martha looked like a skeleton. She was dying of starvation—like the cancer was living off the tiny amount of food she could eat.

ACTOR 1. At first, Evelyn saw this surgery, and ah, the illness, as just like a rude interruption in her full and busy life. But, over the next months she made a slow and graceful adjustment to her new reality.

ACTOR 5. One day a new oncologist—this respected authority on ovarian cancer—came to see my sister. So, ah, he had a Muslim name. When Anne Marie heard the name, she was, uh, so upset. She said, this ... um, she said, “I won’t be treated by an enemy of Christ.” I was ... I was really sad—that this doctor—with all his expertise—would not be able to help my sister.

ACTOR 8. So I said, “Mom, Dad seems depressed.” “Well,” she said, “Of course he’s depressed, he’s dyin’.”

ACTOR 3. I found my family in a tiny waiting room. It had no windows and, I ... I wanted light. I wanted to know that there was a world outside of this one.

ACTOR 2. I wasn't with my mom when she died. But, um, I've always been OK with that. I just—I didn't want her to suffer or be alone when she died. I didn't want her to be afraid. My oldest brother and my niece—my mom called her “my guardian angel”—were with her. I don't think Mom would have wanted the whole family there ... too much fuss. She would have felt obliged to ... hang on ... make lunch ... put on a pot of coffee ... something.

ACTOR 4. It was so sudden. Aunt Jean opened her eyes and just looked at us. I started to say something but stopped. We sat with her for awhile and everyone's eyes filled with tears. *(Pause.)* OK, it was like, a moment of pure love.

ACTOR 6. I ran onto the helipad with my mom. I tried to hold her hand, but I couldn't keep up. They loaded her into the helicopter. I just stood there. On the edge. I thought I wouldn't get to say goodbye. But, and I'll never forget this, a nurse came out of the helicopter and grabbed me. And that nurse, she took me right up into the helicopter—and I got to tell my mom that I loved her and I kissed her. And then they left. And I watched them fly south over the river and then east. I stood there till I couldn't see them anymore.

*(ACTORS exit except for ACTOR 4, who transitions with the addition of a costume piece.)*

## Scene 6: Auntie Mame

ACTOR 4. My mama was eccentric. She was the first in our family to get a tattoo—an angel tattooed on her sternum and wings outspread over her breasts. Trust me, not

something you wanna see at the breakfast table. Hell, she even divorced my papa because he voted for Reagan.

She did an interpretive dance at a school fundraiser, OK? Never studied dance, but loved the idea of performing with veils and scarves—and it was a big hit.

My sisters and I were always encouraged to question authority. You know, use our imaginations. When we would come home from school with our feelings hurt, Mama would say, “Well, that’s not the last person like that you’re going to meet. Let’s think about what you are going to do the next time.” She would lead us in a role-play and before long, we’d all be rolling around on the living room floor laughing. *(Pause.)*

The cancer diagnosis came out of nowhere. We were at the table one morning, discussing the election. And Mama was gearing up for another tirade. But what came out of her mouth was pure gibberish. So, she stopped and then tried to start again. More gibberish. I turned to my sister and she held up the keys. “We’re going to the ER.”

Glioblastoma. Brain tumor.

My sisters and I took turns staying with Mama.

Mama believed that “doctors guess half the time” and was convinced that she really didn’t have a brain tumor. Off she went to a long line of practitioners—naturopaths, Eastern medicine practitioners, faith healers—even though she claimed to be an atheist—hypnotists, and a veterinarian who saw promise in cattle urine.

We wanted her to complete a living will. She gave us back the form—she didn’t fill it out—just wrote DON’T TOUCH ME in large letters across the form.



She left us slowly—conscious less, confused more.

But somehow, we still saw that our strong, courageous, outrageous mama was in there. She had moments of clarity—they broke our hearts. It was like we were being teased by nature, by the stupid tumor that was attacking her fabulous brain.

But then, toward the end there was this, this hilarious thing. Well, for as long as I can remember, Mama always slept in the nude. She laid there, in her bed, unconscious, nude in her fleece bed sheets. The home health workers would come to give us a break. A couple hours later, we'd come back, and, and, Mama would be dressed in a mystery nightgown. Then as soon as the nurses left, we'd undress her. This happened over and over. We laughed. It was Mama's last game with her girls.

*(ACTOR 4 exits while ACTOR 7 enters.)*

### **Scene 7: Hail Mary**

ACTOR 7. Gram had some tough times in her life. She grew up poor. Her folks were farmers. They had a big family and my dad said they worked those kids like dogs. When Gram met my grandpa, her parents forbid her to date him. He wasn't Catholic. Gram married him anyway and was shunned for the rest of her life. Some of her brothers and sisters eventually forgave her—some even married their own Protestants.

So, Gram and Grandpa raised their kids in the Lutheran church and our parents did the same.

Towards the end, Gram had pretty much stopped eating and drinking and was no longer “responsive.”

*(ACTORS 2, 3, 4, 6 and 8 enter.)*

ACTOR 7 (*cont'd*). My brother and sister and I were around her bed along with several of our cousins.

ACTOR 8. We were reminiscing about Christmastime ...

ACTOR 7. About the family cookie bakes ...

ACTOR 4. The caroling ...

ACTOR 3. And Grandma's wonderful handmade presents.

ACTOR 2. Turns out, we were each told that we were her favorite grandchild.

*(All ACTORS should look at each other, some with a knowing nod and others with a sense of joyful surprise.)*

ACTOR 2 (*cont'd*). Then my cousin, Brian, said—

ACTOR 6. I'll never forget when Gram taught me that Catholic prayer, the Hail Mary. She and I would work on it whenever we were together. It was our special secret.

ACTOR 7. We all looked at one another in amazement.

*(One by one, the other actors join in to recite the prayer. It isn't so much a religious moment as it is a realization that it wasn't actually a "special secret.")*

ALL. *Hail Mary, full of grace,*

*The Lord is with thee.*

*Blessed art thou among women,*

*And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*

*Holy Mary, Mother of God,*

*Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.*

*(ACTORS onstage exit—at least two do a high-five, while ACTORS 1 and 5 enter.)*