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Family Plays



A Different Drummer

Comedy/Drama by
Patsy McKay-Jones

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

“I feel a personal kinship for those students who march to a different drummer ... those whom society reserves for their slings and arrows, their barbs and put-downs. *A Different Drummer* is my gift to all those whom society shuns but by whom I am forever touched with every encounter. May they have the strength and courage to continue teaching the rest of humanity the importance of acceptance and love in their truest forms.” (Patsy McKay-Jones)

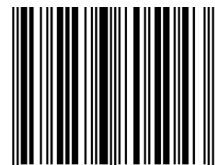
Comedy/Drama. By Patsy McKay-Jones. Cast: 20+ actors, flexible. Neal speaks to the audience: “The topic is acceptance ... Many of us are fortunate ... Words such as exclusion, discrimination and prejudice are not part of our lives. However, they are reality for many people.” Each of the nine vignettes addresses a group of targeted people. This one-act play is the author’s first play and the end of a personal journey. Some scenes are based on actual events; others are fictional. The play toured Canada and The Netherlands before publication. *An almost bare stage, except for seating pieces, allows movement between scenes. Costumes: modern clothing for all except angels in white robes. Approximate running time: 45 minutes. Code: DD4.*

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BY
PATSY MCKAY-JONES

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PATSY MCKAY-JONES

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(A DIFFERENT DRUMMER)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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Cast of Characters

Introduction:

Alyson, Neal, Matt, Ensemble Member (1 female)

Scene 1: *Poverty and Teen Pregnancy*

Jade, Angel Ariel, Ensemble Member (1 female)

Scene 2: *Shyness and Abuse*

Taylor, Angel Emily, Ensemble Members (3 female)

Scene 3: *Learning Disabled & Illiteracy*

Morgan, Evan, Angel Terra, Ensembles Members (3 male, 1 female)

Scene 4: *Cheerleading and Cliques*

Anne, Tasha, Angel Sarah, Ensemble Members (1 male, 4 female)

Scene 5: *Alcoholism and Drug Abuse*

Brody, Angel Ariel, Ensemble Members (2 male, 1 female)

Scene 6: *Tourette Syndrome*

Andy, Angel Emily, Ensemble Members (4 male, 1 female)

Scene 7: *ADHD*

Bailey, Angel Terra, Angel Sarah, Ensemble Members (4 of either sex)

Scene 8: *Body Image*

Callie, Angel Ariel, Ensemble Members (3 female)

Scene 9: *Racism, Homeless, Physical Handicap; AIDS*

Kaitlin, Freddie, Brooke, Dru, Angel Emily, Angel Terra,

Plus many ensemble cast members sitting throughout the audience.

Notes from the Author

Many years ago when my son Clint started first grade, his teacher gave me some valuable advice, which not only had a profound effect on my relationship with my son, but also impacted on my career in teaching. Clint was already displaying signs and symptoms of Tourette Syndrome, a condition I was totally unaware of at the time. His teacher's words still ring clear to me all these twenty years later, "You are trying to fit Clint into a mold. The sooner you realize that he doesn't fit this mold, the happier he will be and so will you." Throughout my teaching career I have felt a personal kinship with those students who like Clint march to a different drummer...those whom society reserves for their slings and arrows, their barbs and putdowns. *A Different Drummer* is my gift to all those whom society shuns but by whom I am forever touched by with every encounter. May they have the strength and courage to continue teaching the rest of humanity the importance of acceptance and love in their truest forms.

A Different Drummer is Patsy's first play script and was originally written for Getting Through To You Productions. She is very honoured to have the following people contribute their poetry to her play:

- Louise Gregory ... Introduction, Scenes 1, 2 (second poem), 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9
- Clint Smith Scene 6 Entitled: The Gift of One Last Breath
- Danielle Zaremba Scene 2 (first poem)

This play was a personal journey for the author. Some of the scenes are based on actual events, while others are fictional...all intended to educate others about the need to care deeply and passionately about our fellow man.

Gratitude

To the very first cast of my drama troupe, of Getting Through To You Productions, composed of seventh and eighth grade students from Beaverbrook School in Moncton, N.B. Canada...and to a second cast of middle/high school students from the AFNorth International School in Brunssum, The Netherlands. Thank you all for teaching such an important message...the acceptance of others.

To my special teacher friends at Beaverbrook School...Faith Reid, Kathy LeBlanc, and Elizabeth Crawford...who felt as strongly as I did about the message of this play and gave their time so willingly.

To Janet Longaphie and Bill Turgeon, my administrators at Beaverbrook School, who encouraged me every step of the way.

To Constable Roland Cormier of the R.C.M.P., Reg Russell, Pres Farris, and Rick Wirsich who took on adult acting roles and in turn became role models for our kids.

To Jenn Ward, a very special "angel" who contributed Scene 4 while a student at Harrison Trimble High School in Moncton.

To Louise Gregory, a gentle soul and wonderful teacher at AFNorth International School who believed in me and my play enough to offer to write most of the poetry for the scenes. Her heartfelt poems and her continual encouragement gave me the confidence to complete this cherished project.

To my son, Clint, for the very special poem he wrote.

To Danielle Zaremba, a student at AFNorth International School, for her poetry.

To Dee-Ann Lemire, a very dear friend, for her attention to detail during the many hours she spent editing my play. Her patience and dedication to this project touched my heart.

A very special thank you to my patient, loving husband Keith Jones who...even when my confidence wavered...always believed in my dream.

Dedication

To my three wonderful grown-up kids—Kerri, Stacy and Clint. This play is dedicated to you. You are my inspiration and my strength. Thank you for allowing me to be your mom and for encouraging me to “fly.”

I love you.

Production Notes

A Different Drummer was performed in Canada and in The Netherlands with approximate cast lists of twenty-five performers each who also doubled as cast and crew. However, the play may be performed using only the main characters who would also take on the ensemble roles. The roles, including those of the angels, are not gender specific.

The play is delivered in the form of nine vignettes or separate stories. It is recommended that the stage lights be lowered between scenes and that appropriate music selections, with or without lyrics, are played to introduce each scene. When the lyrics are chosen to fit the particular topic of the scene, the effect is very emotional and dramatic. If possible, the cast members should take on the role of audience members throughout the play...walking on stage for their particular scene and returning to their seat as the lights go down and the music starts for the next scene. This method proved to be very effective and unexpected for our audiences.

Play Setting

The backdrop of the set is painted to look like the sky using a sponging technique with white and blue paints. Similar colored blue and white fabric is draped across the top of the flats with ivy and dried flowers scattered throughout. A rope swing is hung Center Stage with dried flowers climbing the ropes and hanging from the wooden seat. A cloud is constructed using cotton batting and a cardboard frame...large enough for an angel to sit in, and is situated Stage Left. An archway is decorated with ribbons and flowers Stage Right. Four chairs, each draped with a white cotton fabric, are placed across the back of the stage...two on each side. The ensemble members will use these chairs and will remain frozen during their particular scenes when they are not performing their lines. The angels may appear unexpectedly at various places on or off stage throughout the play i.e. the cloud, the archway, the swing, in the audience, on the balcony (if applicable), or even backstage with just the voice being heard. The stage size and the venue will determine the possible placements.

Costumes

The majority of the cast should wear basic everyday clothing. The angels are dressed in white robes, with angel wings and halos of flowers, ivy, and ribbons.

Properties

Scene 1: Teddy bear; storybook (ensemble girl); small table; 2 chairs; side table with phone on top

Scene 3: Book; paper (ensemble girl)

Scene 4: Gym bag (Anne)

Scene 7: Papers, pencil, books (Bailey); 4 student desks (ensemble members)

Scene 8: Glamour magazine (Callie); stool with rose on top

Scene 9: Wheelchair (Brooke)

Optional Activities

An unexpected follow-up to the play was an activity packet designed and initiated by the eighth grade middle school teachers at the AFNorth International School in The Netherlands. The following is a summary of some of the activities the students took part in directly after viewing the production.

Description:

You will watch the play, *A Different Drummer*, put on by your peers. They hope that this play will raise some issues and help you think about your behavior towards others. After the play you will have the opportunity to discuss what you have learned with some of your classmates. Admission to the play is a donation of canned or packaged food for the Adolescent Homeless Shelter in Heerlen. After the play you will return to your classroom where you will participate in a variety of activities.

Activity 1: Class Discussion

Class Discussion of the quote by Henry David Thoreau, "If a man cannot keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he walks to a different drummer. Let him step to the music he hears, no matter how measured or far away." Please put this quote in your own words supported by an example(s) from the play or from your own experiences.

Sometimes when someone is different or does not meet our standards we ignore them or worse make them the brunt of our jokes. Why do we do this when we know that it is cruel and unfair?

Activity 2: Think...Pair...Share Activity

- a.) Read the handout on Thought Provoking Stuff!
- b.) Try to write the answers to the handout questions.
- c.) Pair up with another student to share your responses.
- d.) Students will be asked to share their responses with the entire class.

Activity 3: Letter Writing Activity

Each of you will write a letter to one of the individuals portrayed in the play. Explain to the individual how you felt as you watched the scene

unfold and describe how the scene had an impact on you. You do not have to sign your letter. All of the letters will be shared with the cast.

Handout Questions

The world is not always as we perceive it. After reading the statistics on Thought Provoking Stuff!, answer the following questions.

Are you in the majority or the minority?

Give the profile of the average human on earth. Is there such a thing?

How does this activity help you see the need for acceptance, understanding and education?

What will be your role in the future to help everyone in the world to have a better life?

Thought Provoking Stuff!

If we could shrink the earth's population to a village or precisely one hundred people, with all the existing human ratios remaining the same, it would look something like the following.

There would be:

57 Asians

21 Europeans

14 from the Western Hemisphere, both North and South

8 Africans

52 would be female
48 would be male

70 would be non-white
30 would be white

70 would be non-Christian
30 would be Christian

89 would be heterosexual
11 would be homosexual

6 people would possess 59% of the entire world's wealth and all 6
would be from the United States

80 would be living in substandard housing
70 would be unable to read
50 would suffer from malnutrition
1 would be near death: 1 would be near birth
1 (yes, only 1) would have a college education
1 would own a computer

When one considers our world from such a compressed perspective, the
need for acceptance, understanding and education becomes glaringly
apparent.

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

by Patsy McKay-Jones

*[AT RISE: INTRODUCTORY MUSIC fades, LIGHTS come up.
ALYSON, NEAL, and MATT are Center Stage facing the audience]*

ALYSON. The dictionary defines prejudice as a biased opinion based on emotion rather than reason.

NEAL. To have empathy is to understand the feelings of another person.

MATT. To be tolerant is to respect the opinions and rights of others.

NEAL. The play you are about to see is titled A Different Drummer and the topic is acceptance. Many of us are fortunate to have the support of loving and caring families and friends. Words such as exclusion, discrimination, and prejudice are not part of our lives. However, they are reality for many people in our society.

ALYSON. There are so many people around us who are just ignored...on a daily basis...almost as if they don't exist.

MATT. There are others who would love to be ignored rather than being laughed at and never understanding why.

NEAL. Are we always as kind and compassionate as we should be...

MATT. ...to our senior citizens?

ALYSON. ...to the mentally handicapped?

NEAL. ...to the small child being bullied?

MATT. ...to the teenagers down the street who dare to be different?

ALYSON. ...to other cultures and religions?

NEAL. ...to the cancer patient who may be winning the fight but losing her hair in the process?

ALYSON. ...to that person always left out of the clique?

[ENSEMBLE appears on the apron of the stage and talks to the audience]

ENSEMBLE. I'm the little girl you laughed at

When I walked upon the stage

My clothes were old and not so cool

And my shoes were not the rage.

You looked at me and judged me

Like a book upon the shelf

All that mattered was my total look
...and my parents' wealth.

I'm the girl who held my hands
Inside my sleeves at school
I'm the one they called untouchable
The one they treated cruel.

My hands were my embarrassment
My eczema red and dry
No one held my hand to dance
Not one single guy.

But what they saw was the outside
It was the shell of me
The true person was hidden away
For no one else to see.

Now I am a grownup
I've passed the hardest test
I've developed myself
From the inside out
I'm different from the rest.

I look at all who pass my way
I smile a happy smile
I've learned that everyone on earth
Is only here a while

I enjoy each precious day
I speak kindly to all I see
I try to do a caring deed
It makes my heart feel free.

I'll only pass this way but once
I value those I meet
A friendship is a gift from God
A daily heavenly treat.
Life is not a rehearsal
Appreciate each day

Love your friends
Be kind to all
Look inside their shell
For the treasures you may find
May one day serve you well.

ALYSON. To all the people out there who hear a different drummer; we would like to give you permission to be different and to be proud!

NEAL. Is there more that we could be doing to help? It is said that angels step lightly but leave footprints on our hearts. One doesn't need to wear wings or halos to help a person in need. Tonight you are going to meet a group of angels-in-training, just ordinary kids trying to make a difference. Our hope is that your heart will be touched by our message.

[BLACKOUT. MUSIC plays during scene change]

SCENE 1

[AT RISE: MUSIC fades; LIGHTS up. JADE is Center Stage. An ENSEMBLE MEMBER...a little girl...is sitting on the stage holding a teddy bear and looking at a storybook]

JADE. *[To audience]* Have you ever heard the saying... "a diamond is a piece of coal that stuck to its job?" I like that saying. It says, "Don't give up, no matter what!"

GIRL #1. Mommy, what are we having for supper tonight? I'm hungry, Mommy.

JADE. *[To daughter]* Just a few more minutes, Honey. *[To audience]* I look too young to be a mother...right? Well, I am too young and reality is a one-bedroom apartment and an eviction notice delivered today. Reality is no place to live, no food, no job. I see the way you look at me...like dirt under your feet...another teen pregnancy, another statistic. That's all I am to you. I also know what you're thinking. I made my bed, now I have to lie in it. Getting pregnant at fourteen and quitting school was the choice I made. Yes, we all make choices.

GIRL #1. Mommy, my tummy aches.

JADE. *[To daughter]* Supper is almost ready, Sweetheart. *[To audience]* I made the choice but she is the one who is suffering. I can't get a decent job. Oh, poverty was always a part of my life. I come from

a large family and money was always scarce, no matter how many jobs my dad worked. I wore any hand-me-downs my mom could find. But I was proud, so proud because we were survivors. We had something more special than anything money could buy. We had love and we had each other. There's a song called A Coat of Many Colors. Every time I hear that song, it reminds me of my mom. When I was about nine years old, she made me a winter coat from an old worn-out coat my grandmother had given her. She just turned the material inside out and made this beautiful long coat for me. I will always treasure that memory. When I look back, I remember love more than poverty. That's what I want someday for my little girl. But I need to be strong and I just can't fall apart. I'm ashamed to ask for help. My mom and dad have been through so much with me and here I am on their doorstep again. I read that each star in the sky is an angel that shines as a beacon of hope in the darkness. *[Glancing upward]* Please, if you really are up there...please tell me what to do!

ANGEL ARIEL. First, my dear, you must be strong

For now you are a mom
Your little girl needs your strength
Your love and all that's calm.

Think of her and all her needs
Then turn to those you love
Let them help you, let them love you
Be the best Mom you can be
For when your child feels that love
A healthy child she'll be.

JADE. *[To audience]* "Never be afraid to ask for help." How many times have my mom and dad said that to me? And what is it that Dad always says, "Success isn't measured by the position you reach in life; it's measured by the obstacles you overcome."

GIRL #1. Mommy, are you all right? You look so sad.

JADE. *[To daughter]* Mommy is going to be fine. We're both going to be just fine. *[Glancing upward]* Thank you, my angel, wherever you are. I know what I have to do now. *[Picking up phone]* Mom, it's Jade...I need your help...

[BLACKOUT. MUSIC plays during scene change]

SCENE 2

[AT RISE: MUSIC fades; LIGHTS up. TAYLOR is Center Stage. ENSEMBLE PLAYERS #1 and #2 are seated on ensemble seats Stage Left and ENSEMBLE PLAYER #3 is seated Stage Right. The following poem is heard over the sound system as CHARACTERS on stage remain frozen]

ANGEL SARAH. Make footprints in the earth's silver soil

To mark the path our lives have crossed.

We are who we are, but we are now different people.

We so long ago rolled down the painted hills, but now their grass is far too long for rolling and hits us in the face.

The grass no longer springs back to life as if calling us back for just one more time.

The scratches on our knees no longer have brown scabs about them, but have faded into scars.

The Band-Aids we wear now are no longer covered with color or have cartoon pictures about them...we have changed.

The mud puddles do not seem interesting anymore and raindrops over time have lost their taste of gumdrops.

Through our eyes, we see the same serene places...now, however, we have learned to appreciate their beauty.

When we were young, beauty didn't matter because it was everywhere.

We leave our childhood wiser, possessing many memories of years past.

We have written our own life story, complete with faint scars...and savoring the brightness in our eyes.

TAYLOR. I've always been afraid of my own shadow...you know the type...shy, quiet, scared. In fact, I can't believe I'm here talking to all of you right now. The fact is, for years I rarely opened my mouth. It was a way to protect myself...I thought...but...nobody understood.

GIRL #1. Has the cat got your tongue?

GIRL #2. What a snob. She thinks she's better than the rest of us.

TAYLOR. No one understood how much I really wanted to be like them...to be confident, to feel that someone would even want to listen to me. My mom did her best to encourage me, but she was always shy too.

GIRL #3. You're a beautiful young lady inside and out, Taylor, and someday you'll realize that.

TAYLOR. When I was fifteen, someone did come along...someone who changed my life forever...my mom's new boyfriend. He was so wonderful to both of us...a dream come true. They say that when something seems too good to be true, it probably is. Looking back, the picture is a whole lot clearer...a mother and daughter...both shy, insecure, needy, easy to control, easily possessed. Whatever little self-respect we did have, he took away from us. In the beginning, my mom got the worst of it. Abuse rips the heart and soul out of you and leaves you as a shell...empty and worthless. When he tired of Mom, he turned to me and I was too scared to fight back. Every time he touched me I lost another part of my soul. My will to go on in this life was gone. I wanted out. I could see no possible light at the end of the tunnel. Maybe God wouldn't have me in heaven, but even hell couldn't be worse than this. I found my mom's pain medication and I quickly embraced what I believed to be the only road left for me. I remember feeling at peace...what a wonderful calmness washed over me. But then I woke up in the emergency ward and reality hit. Mom and I finally got some help. We lived in a shelter for a while and with the aid of some very patient counselors we told our story...releasing years of pent up anger and hurt. I'm finally starting to find out who I really am. I'm me! I guess I had lost "me" somewhere in all those years of misery. I had always depended on others to define who I was. I am also starting to like myself. If you've ever been shy yourself, you'll understand what I mean. I now know I can't change what happened. But I can change where I go from here. I'm starting over. I'm leaving the past behind and walking away.

ANGEL EMILY. When we take our walk of life

There are friends who come our way
Some are dear and caring friends
And those we want to stay.

They're helpful, kind and loving
They accept us as we are
They help us through the hard times
When the answers seem too far.

There are also those who seem to be
Our friends who we can trust
But when their selfishness comes out

Our balloons just kind of bust.
True friendship is a precious gift
A treasure in our hearts
It can't be bought...it can't be sold
It is yours forever and ever...and evermore.

TAYLOR. You could do me such a huge favor when you leave here tonight. The next time you see a quiet girl at the checkout counter or in line at the bank...don't assume anything. She may be carrying a heavy burden and your smile could make a world of difference. Every time you meet a stranger, it's also a chance to make a friend...and perhaps...be touched by an angel.

[BLACKOUT. MUSIC plays during scene change]

SCENE 3

[AT RISE: MUSIC fades; LIGHTS up. MORGAN is standing Stage Left and EVAN Stage Right; BOTH facing audience. FOUR ENSEMBLE MEMBERS are seated in the ensemble chairs]

MORGAN. Did you ever wish that you were someone else...had someone else's life? I think about that a lot. I fantasize that I'm popular, with loads of friends, and that they like me because I'm SMART. You see I'm the opposite of smart. I'm DUMB and I get told that many times everyday.

BOY #1. Did you see that dumb Morgan in class today? He is so stupid, is he for real?

BOY #2. He can't even read. It's a riot when the teacher asks him to read in class.

BOY #3. What a klutz! People like him shouldn't be allowed to go to gym class.

BOY #1. How did he ever make it to eighth grade?

MORGAN. I wonder myself how I made it. They say that I am learning disabled, that I can't learn as fast as the other kids, and that it's not my fault. But no one understands me or even wants to try. *[Freeze]*

EVAN. When you're desperate, you can fool anyone. I've fooled people for years...my wife, my kids, my boss...none of them knew my secret...I couldn't read!! Leaving school at a young age was a choice I made. I have worked so hard to raise my family and give them the

things that I didn't have; but it hurts so much that there was always something that I couldn't give to them.

GIRL. [*Crosses to Evan from seat*] Daddy, would you read me a story like Mommy does?

EVAN. [*To daughter*] Sorry honey, but Daddy is too busy right now. Maybe later. [*To audience*] Maybe later. That's what I kept telling myself too. I'll get help...maybe later! [*Freeze*]

MORGAN. The doctors say that I'll learn to deal with my disability as I get older. But right now is what I'm concerned about. I can't deal with the daily put-downs. I worry each day that a teacher is going to get me to read or ask me a question and I'll give a stupid answer. I hate school. Why can't people look past my disability and just accept me? I hope that someday they'll be laughing *with* me instead of at me. At least I can hope! [*Freeze*]

EVAN. I was hoping, too. Hoping that my boss would never ask me to write anything; because I couldn't write. I struggled to sign my name. Hoping my little girl would never find out that her dad couldn't read her prize-winning report.

GIRL. [*Crosses to Evan from seat*] Daddy, aren't you proud of me? Please Daddy, read it so I'll know you're proud of me.

EVAN. [*To daughter*] Honey, Daddy can't read it...DADDY CAN'T READ! [*To audience*] There...my secret was out. All those years of hiding were over. Yes, it's embarrassing...humiliating. But, it's also a new beginning for me. I'm a grown man and I'm learning to read. What a wonderful world has been opened up for me.

ANGEL TERRA. I wonder if I'll ever see

All the angels who give help to me
They touch my life in many ways
Doctors, nurses, teachers too
Unseen heroes and friends so true.

They lift me up when I am down
They gently influence me...without a frown
They work behind the scenes
They help us all
Without their guidance...many would fall.

So look around...give a smile, a nod
A soft thank you to the helpers of God.

EVAN. *[To audience]* I am on this fantastic journey. I'm taking baby steps right now, but I'm looking forward to every twist and turn on the road ahead. I'm sure I'll run into many detours, but I'll find a way to get back on the main road again. I look forward to the day when I am asked...

GIRL. *[Crosses to Evan]* Dad, can you come and help me practice for the drama tryouts?

EVAN. And I can say...“Sure honey, which part do you want me to read?” *[Looks up]* Thank you!

[BLACKOUT. MUSIC plays during scene change]