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Dramatic Publishing



ONE DAY AT THE ZOO

A Comedy/Drama in One Act

by

G.M. (BUD) THOMPSON



Dramatic Publishing

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(ONE DAY AT THE ZOO)

Cover design by Susan Carle

ISBN 0-87129-741-8

To my family, who are reflected here in the love, faithfulness, and endurance shown, rather than in any particular character. It has not always been easy, but we have survived...with style, humor, and devotion. And that's what being a family is all about. I would gladly spend every one of the rest of my days in your company.

ONE DAY AT THE ZOO was originally produced and performed by the Sr. Highs Of Eastminster (S.H.O.E.) of Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Performances took place on May 5, 6, 7, 1995 under the direction of the author and featured the following cast:

GLENN RIDGELAND	Dave Vander Weele
MONICA RIDGELAND	Jamie Mapes
BECKY RIDGELAND	Sarah Underhill
RYAN RIDGELAND	Adam Hoane
LAYTHREX	Tom S. Meeker
VOICE OF THE NARRATOR	Jaime Smith
RITA CARLSON	Melanie Buechler
SAM ERICSON	Dean Heffron

All cast and crew were youth ages 15-18. It was performed in the church basement dining room on a modest budget.

ONE DAY AT THE ZOO

A Comedy/Drama in One Act
For 3 Men, 3 Women, 2 offstage voices

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

GLENN RIDGELAND husband/father
MONICA RIDGELAND wife/mother
BECKY RIDGELAND their daughter, high school age
RYAN RIDGELAND their son, high school age
Voice of LAYTHREX the Ridgeland's caretaker
(Needs to be performed live from offstage.)

VOICE OF THE NARRATOR

(Should be performed live to allow for flexibility, but must be consistent in delivery, as it is referred to as being recorded in the script. Could actually be recorded, but timing of delivery varies from performance to performance within the show.)

RITA CARLSON a high school student
SAM ERICSON a high school student

THE TIME: The present.

THE PLACE:

The Intergalactic Zoo's Earth Family Natural Habitat
Display and Anthropological Exposition Theatre on an
unnamed planet 450,000,000 light years from Earth.

Note: DO NOT print The Place information in your program nor refer to it in your advertising. Half the fun is surprising your audience during the play.

At "THE EARTH HUMAN FAMILY!" we started a majestic piece of music, which happened to be part of the main theme from the film *Jurassic Park*. We let this play for a bit, then picked up the narration.

At the first reference to the Milky Way, we began a series of slide projections of the universe that were loaned to us from the local planetarium. We were very fortunate that, besides great slides of space that took us, along with the narration, from Milky Way to solar system to Earth itself, we also got slides of a variety of earth settings, landscapes, plants, animals, and people.

We showed these through the phrase "It is the Human Being," following which the stage went dark. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is our pleasure..." was done in the dark to allow the actors to position themselves. As indicated by the stage directions, following the introduction of "...the foremost... grouping on the planet: the Earth Human Family!", the lights came up and the Ridgelanders were "on display."

During the narration that follows I gave the actors simple movements to complement the descriptions (turning around to show they had "no tails," opening and closing their hands like lobster pinchers to show they had "opposable thumbs," etc.). These are just some ideas...Do with it what you will.

The second presentation (the "send-up" show, we called it) is a wonderful opportunity to camp it up. I let the cast decide on their own extreme characters (as they would have had it been really happening) and they were extreme...ly fun. Melanie and Dean (as Rita and Sam) were great in their own creations of dressing in "drag." My undying admiration to Dean, a real-life football star, for going out in a wig, skirt, and tight sweater complete with...ah...large drink cups underneath in front of all his friends. We got no negative feedback about

cross-dressing being in a “church” youth play. Everyone understood and joined in the fun.

This idea and script began after I had spent the 1992 Presidential campaign (and subsequent smaller campaigns) listening to politicians throw around the term “family values” as if it only meant one thing and we all understood and agreed on that one thing.

But as I considered the youth and the families I know, it was clear that it does not mean just one thing (one family structure, one set of morals or ideals or family goals) and we do not all share the same understanding or agree with each other on its meaning. It struck me: how dangerous it was to be electing these people to positions of extreme power based on a concept that was that varied and vague. WHOSE family values would this elected official advocate? What does “family values” mean? What does being a family mean?

So I thought: if there were a circumstance where you took away all the “stuff”: the possessions and the schedules and the social status jobs and activities...if you reduced a family to its basic element: people in relationship...what would being a family mean? Meet the Ridgelands, who get to spend the rest of their lives answering that question...

Scientific and Anthropological Information in the script was adapted from Compton's Encyclopedia, Online Edition downloaded from America Online, January 12, 1995.

ONE DAY AT THE ZOO

SETTING: *The stage is simple, formed like a T, with the main CENTER section extending toward the audience in a Thrust stage arrangement. The "wings" of the T run along the U end, with the only entrance/exit being UC through some curtains that hang behind the length of the stage. At the opening, the stage is set to look like an ordinary, if not very devoid of imagination, home. There is a bookshelf with books and a large plant, an accent table with a fish bowl with fish in it and a painting on the wall. DC there is a small kitchenette table and four chairs. There is a newspaper on the table. That is all. No other furniture. There are two microphones which hang from above, one each over the R and L edges of the CENTER section on the stage.*

Before the play formally begins, GLENN enters through the single escape UC. He carries a small tray with a pitcher of coffee and other necessary items. He sets the tray on the table and prepares a cup of coffee. He sits at the table, sipping coffee and gazing at the paper. He doesn't seem to be actually reading it. In fact, his mind seems to be elsewhere. He continues this until the house lights fade and MONICA enters, carrying a large tray of food, dishes, and utensils.

MONICA. Are the kids up?

GLENN. Becky is, but I haven't heard anything from Ryan.

MONICA. That boy! Doesn't he know it's Saturday? This is our busiest day. He does this every week.

GLENN. Frankly, my dear, I'm not sure he gives a damn. And I'm not sure that I can blame him.

MONICA. Well, why don't you explain to him what's going on here and how he's endangering all of us. You're the father here...

GLENN. I wouldn't put that up to a vote.

MONICA (*frustrated, goes to the entrance*). BECKY! RYAN!

BECKY (*from offstage*). I'm up, Mom.

MONICA. RYAN?

RYAN (*from offstage. Mumbling, still half asleep*). Humphramergle...

MONICA. RYAN, PLEASE GET UP. YOU'RE ALREADY LATE AND IT'S SATURDAY...

RYAN. Saturday, schmaterday...

GLENN. RYAN, DO WHAT YOUR MOTHER SAYS OR I'LL COME IN THERE AND GET YOU UP...

RYAN (*full of sarcasm*). Ohhh, I'm jumpin' now...

MONICA (*pleading*). PLEASE, RYAN?

RYAN. OK, OK...

MONICA (*to GLENN*). How's the coffee?

GLENN. The usual.

MONICA. Anything new in the paper?

GLENN. Might be...if it were a new paper. Would you like to hear your horoscope from several months ago?

MONICA. That's OK...

GLENN. I just don't get it. For all they can do, you think they'd be able to supply us with an occasional NEW newspaper and some decent coffee.

MONICA. Glenn, don't start, please...

GLENN. OK, so maybe I told them when we got here that one of my routines was that I liked to read the paper in the morning. I didn't mean the SAME paper every morning...

MONICA. I'm sure they're doing the best they can...

GLENN. This is the best they can do? With their technology? Why can't they just...

MONICA (*exploding quietly*). Just what? Go down to the corner 7-Eleven and pick up a *New York Times* and a can of Maxwell House? You seem to have forgotten where we are...

GLENN. No, I remember EXACTLY where we are. I remember every minute of every day. And I also remember there's not a thing I can do about it. I just wish something could be done to make it a little less...excruciatingly mundane. I realize we're a long way from home...

MONICA. To be exact, we're four hundred and fifty...

GLENN. I know, I know. (*He pauses, trying to control his anger.*) We are four hundred and fifty...(*He has trouble even saying it.*)...million light years from home! But they brought us here, the least they can do is provide for us. I don't think coffee is asking a lot.

MONICA. Glenn, it is not like we are visiting dignitaries here. We belong to them now, and they'll do with us what they want, including feeding us what they want. At least they're *trying* to feed us our own food. I think you could try to be a little more cooperative...

GLENN. Cooperative? Cooperative? They take us out of our beds in the middle of the night, drag us halfway across the universe, stick us in here, where we sit day after day, answering all their stupid questions and doing everything they tell us to, and you want me to be more cooperative?

MONICA. Will you lower your voice! No, we are not dignitaries. We are not tourists. We are not even manual labor

slaves. We are zoo animals! And what happens if we're not good, cooperative zoo animals? What do you think they'll do with us? Take us back home? At least think about the children: you could be endangering them. And all you're worried about is getting a decent cup of coffee and yesterday's basketball scores...

(BECKY enters from UC, dressed and ready to face the day. She realizes that she has walked in on yet another fight between her parents. She takes a seat at the table as she talks.)

BECKY. Morning. What's for breakfast?

GLENN. Next thing on the rotation.

BECKY *(sampling the food)*. Gosh, Mom, can't you teach these people how to cook? These pancakes are the worst...

GLENN. I'm sure they're doing the best they can...

MONICA. Considering they never even HEARD of pancakes until we tried to describe them.

BECKY. I mean, this "normal diet in the wild" thing is a nice effort, but if they can't get it right...

GLENN. We should probably be thankful they're not making us eat the local food.

MONICA. Eat your breakfast, Beck. It's getting cold and we've got a long day ahead of us.

(RYAN enters from UC. He has obviously just rolled out of bed: he is wearing whatever he slept in, his hair is a mess, and his eyes are only slits of consciousness. He stumbles to the table and takes a seat.)

GLENN. Why, look, dear...they must be setting up a new display: Earth Corpse.

MONICA. Ryan, please eat your breakfast and get ready. We don't have a lot of time.

RYAN. Whatever. What's the Slop Du Jour?

BECKY. Your favorite.

RYAN. OOOooooo, Pancakes from Hell. And Orange Ooze.

I'm so glad I got up...*(They all begin to eat.)*

BECKY. Mom, you know what today would have been?

RYAN. Waddaya mean, "would have been"?

BECKY. Back home. On earth. I made a calendar and I've been keeping track.

RYAN. Keeping track? Why?

BECKY. Because I want to. Besides, I want to know what's going on at home so that, when we get rescued...

RYAN. You still think we're gonna get rescued?

BECKY. Yes I do.

RYAN. Jeeesh...*(He laughs sarcastically and shakes his head.)*

MONICA. Anyway, no, dear, I don't know what today would have been?

BECKY. Today would have been Oct. 15. That means it's Homecoming at school. The football game will be this afternoon, and then tonight Steve would have taken me to the dance. I'd have worn that dress we looked at in Madeline's...

RYAN. Now he's probably taking Jessica Worthington.

BECKY *(appalled)*. Jessica? No way...

RYAN. You're right, Beck. I'm sure he's still sitting at home waiting for you to be rescued...

BECKY *(hurt by this, but tries to be strong)*. OK, maybe he will take somebody else. But it would NEVER be Jessica Worthington.

RYAN. C'mon, Beck. Hop on the clue bus. You must have been the only kid in school who didn't see how they looked at each other in the hall.

BECKY. He HATED her. He told me so.

RYAN. Of course, that's what he TOLD you...

(As throughout the play, we only hear LAYTHREX's VOICE coming through the P.A. system. He never appears on stage.)

LAYTHREX. Good day, Ridgeland. I trust you had a pleasant night.

MONICA. It was fine, thank you.

LAYTHREX. Are there any problems or needs you wish to make me aware of before we start our day?

RYAN. Yeah, Beck would like you to abduct a human named Jessica Worthington and dump her on some godforsaken planet somewhere...

MONICA. Ryan!

LAYTHREX. It is hard for us to locate specific individuals, but if you could give us a description and some location information...

BECKY. He's only joking, Laythrex. Ignore him.

LAYTHREX. ...we might be able to bring your friend here...

BECKY *(at the same time)*. NO!

RYAN. YES! *(BECKY looks at RYAN with surprise.)* She was pretty hot...And she'd probably be more fun than Rita.

LAYTHREX. Are you unhappy with Rita?

RYAN. No, she's OK, I guess. It's just that sometimes...

LAYTHREX. As the zoo staff person responsible for your care, your happiness and well-being is my job.

GLENN. Well, there are a couple of things...*(MONICA shoots him a look.)*

MONICA (*carefully*). Maybe we could talk about the food sometime. I think I could help you improve it.

LAYTHREX. Let me make a note: review Earthling's food.

Oh, by the way, Glenn, if you go to the access chute, you'll find a new newspaper.

GLENN (*excited*). Really? (*He quickly exits UC.*)

MONICA. That means you've been to Earth?

LAYTHREX. A routine research mission. Returned a few days ago.

(*GLENN enters from UC carrying the newspaper.*)

GLENN. *The Eureka Gazette?*

RYAN. Eureka, where?

GLENN (*searches through paper*). California. I can't believe it! Laythrex, we're from New Jersey. That's on the other side of the continent from California. Couldn't you have done better than this?

LAYTHREX. It was the best we could do under the circumstances. They were busy with...other things.

MONICA. Well, we're very grateful for the paper. Aren't we, Glenn?

GLENN. Yeah, thanks...

LAYTHREX. Is there anything else you'll be needing?

RYAN. Ya know, Laythrex, I was thinking last night: pretty soon it'll be Halloween on Earth. You guys know what Halloween is?

LAYTHREX. A minor festival of some kind as I recall...

BECKY. Yeah, people dress up in costumes and exchange candy and have parties and stuff like that.

LAYTHREX. Ah, yes, I remember now. I believe our research teams have used this festival to walk among you undetected...

GLENN (*surprised*). You have?

LAYTHREX. In fact, we are still conducting tests to determine the nutritional value of a...Mr. Goocy Bar. They seem to be very popular with your species...

MONICA. Let me save you a lot of work: there is none.

RYAN (*excited*). You guys have a Mr. Goocy Bar?

LAYTHREX. Last year, our team came back with several bags full of this sort of food supplement. Apparently, the natives thought our "costumes" were very good...

RYAN. Laythrex, can I have a Mr. Goocy Bar...PLEASE?

MONICA. You haven't even finished your breakfast.

BECKY (*under her breath*). Talk about no nutritional value...

LAYTHREX. I'm sorry, Ryan, but that is considered a valuable scientific specimen. Perhaps we could duplicate one for you...

RYAN (*eying his breakfast*). Never mind...Actually, I was just wondering if your researchers and zoo customers would be interested in seeing how we celebrate Halloween...

LAYTHREX. Hummm...Yes, I think that would interest them greatly.

RYAN. Cool. I'll make up a list of the things we need.

LAYTHREX. That would be fine. Please keep a watch on your time, Ridgeland. Our first presentation will start shortly.

MONICA. We'll be ready, Laythrex. Ryan, finish up your breakfast, please. (*They all begin to move and straighten up, as if company were coming. RYAN stays seated and picks at his food.*) Ryan, come on, honey.

RYAN. OK, OK, I'm working on it. (*Activity continues around RYAN, but now GLENN has stopped and is watching his son with increasing anger. RYAN still picks at his plate.*)

MONICA. RYAN, PLEASE!

RYAN. Chill, OK? Can't I just eat this garbage in peace for once?

GLENN. If you wanted to eat in peace, maybe you should have gotten up early enough to have the time.

RYAN. What are they going to do, start without us?

MONICA. Ryan, none of us likes this situation, but we have to make the best of it. Being uncooperative isn't going to get us anywhere...

RYAN (*angry*). Where is there to get by being cooperative? I don't see what big advantage there is to constantly kissing up to these aliens.

MONICA (*about to explode, to RYAN through clenched teeth*). It might just keep us alive. Now, you will finish your food, young man, and you will get ready. Do you understand? (*RYAN says nothing, but turns away. MONICA and BECKY exit.*)

RYAN (*pushing the plate away*). I can't eat anymore of this. It's making me sick. (*He rises and begins to exit.*)

GLENN. Ryan...(*RYAN stops but does not turn around.*) I wish you wouldn't give your mother such a hard time. She's very frightened for all of us. She could use a little understanding and cooperation.

RYAN. Is that a request or an order?

GLENN. I'm your father. You're my son. You decide.

RYAN (*laughs to himself, then thinks*). She wants to make the best of it, but when I try to imagine the best, it still makes me sick. So what am I supposed to do?

GLENN. Maybe think about her feelings for a change, instead of just yours.

RYAN. And who's going to think about my feelings? Huh, Dad? Who? Does anybody REALLY care about MY feelings? Does anybody REALLY care that all I've got to look

forward to for the rest of my life is my family, Rita, Richard, a few rooms, and a stage? That's all there'll ever be. EVER! And that's the best?

GLENN. They gave us that big yard...

RYAN. I haven't been out in that yard for weeks, Dad. Have you?

GLENN. Your mother and I take walks every night.

RYAN. Yeah, after the zoo's closed and it's dark. A few laps around the perimeter. Now, there's a life!

GLENN. Ryan...

RYAN. You don't go out during the day for the same reason I don't. Because even though we've got this big, beautiful yard all around the pavilion, the fences are lined with crowds of...of...of the most disgusting collection of... things...all pressed up against the shield and making those...noises. And they throw stuff at me, Dad. They want me to pick it up and eat it. Have you looked at this stuff? I'm sure it's like popcorn or something to them, but it's this gross slimy gray stuff...or the black things with the tentacles...The last time I was out, one landed at my feet. It MOVED, Dad. *(An awkward pause. GLENN knows that this is the truth.)* So this is my life: A yard I can only go into at night, a few rooms, some loser food, some loser strangers, and my loser family. Excuse me for not being more motivated and grateful.

(RYAN exits. As he goes, MONICA enters, carrying a bowl of fruit, which she sets on the table. GLENN is crushed. An awkward pause.)

GLENN. Ryan just called us his "loser family."

MONICA. I know. I heard. *(Pause.)* Glenn, he's sixteen...and he's scared...and he's angry...he's going to say things...