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**American Association of
Community Theatre AACT
NewPlayFest Winning Plays:
Volume 3 (2018)**

Finishing School by
ELAINE LINER

Making Sweet Tea and Other Secrets by
PAUL ELLIOTT

Eternity by
MICHAEL COCHRAN

Mynx & Savage by
REBECCA GORMAN O'NEILL

Treehouse by
JOE MUSSO

Sweet by
DENISE HINSON

Dramatic Publishing Company
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All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Community Theatre (AACT) is proud to present the six winning scripts and playwrights of the third AACT NewPlayFest cycle. AACT NewPlayFest is an initiative by AACT to address the critical need for new, high-quality plays for community theatre audiences around the globe. It has been embraced by playwrights and theatres across the country, bringing exciting theatrical journeys to producing companies and joyful realization and anticipation to playwrights and their work.

AACT is pleased to partner with Dramatic Publishing Company for this program. AACT NewPlayFest is unparalleled in new play competitions, providing full productions of the winning scripts, plus publication and rights representation by a major theatrical publisher.

This third cycle of AACT NewPlayFest, ending in 2018, proved even more successful than the first two. More scripts were submitted, and six theatres across the country produced world premieres of winning scripts. This festival continues to benefit the producing theatres by giving them the excitement of bringing new works to their patrons, and the playwrights by experiencing quality productions of their work, and publication and representation by Dramatic Publishing. The benefits of AACT NewPlayFest will expand as additional theatres produce these top-notch plays.

We hope you will consider one of these plays for your next season.

Break a leg,

Quiana Clark-Roland, Executive Director
American Association of Community Theatre

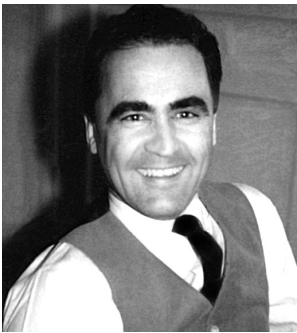
The American Association of Community Theatre is the resource connection for America's theatres. AACT represents the interests of more than 7,000 theatres across the United States and its territories, as well as theatre companies with the U.S. Armed Services overseas. To learn more about AACT NewPlayFest and AACT go to aact.org.

FOREWORD

Jack K. Ayre, born in Pittsburgh on July 9, 1921, celebrated his 90th birthday before passing away in December 2011. At his birthday party in Sunnyvale, Calif., he sang with a barbershop quartet—one of his favorite activities—and celebrated with his cousin and lifelong friend, Frank Ayre Lee. Though as adults they lived on opposite sides of the country, the cousins kept in touch through letters that displayed a love for the written word and an irreverent sense of humor. Jack had participated in theatre productions at Drew University in New Jersey and at a community theatre in Connecticut in his younger years, and continued that interest when he moved to California.

Frank, a chemical engineer by profession, was also an avid aficionado of theatre and had dabbled in playwriting, adapting Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* for a children's theatre production, and penning *McSteg*, a tongue-in-cheek discourse ribbing his cousin Jack and based on a scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation has been created by the children of Frank as a tribute to their father, who passed away in August 2012, and a legacy for the creative endeavors of Jack, who was an advertising executive and public relations director. The family is pleased to honor both men through a lasting legacy promoting new works for theatre.



Jack K. Ayre



Frank Ayre Lee

Photos: Courtesy of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation.

Finishing School

By
ELAINE LINER

Finishing School received its premier production at the Elkhart Civic Theatre at the Bristol Opera House in Bristol, Ind., on Sept. 8, 2017.

CAST:

Al..... Dave Dufour
Wizzer Gail Janssen
Minnie Melissa Auvil
Shirley..... Sandra Woodiwiss
Announcement Voice Elaine Liner

PRODUCTION:

DirectorKevin Egelsky
Assistants to the DirectorVictoria Kucharski, Bob Franklin
Stage Manager Kristi McCreary
Stage Crew Spencer Murphy
Lights/Sound OperatorGarry Cobburn
Set and Lighting Design..... John Shoup
Set Construction.....John Shoup, Kevin Egelsky
Sound DesignGarry Cobburn
Costume and Properties Design Victoria Kucharski
Front of House Manager Carl Wiesinger
Program Design Kristin Schwerha

In addition to the information on the Important Billing and Credit Requirements page (p. 3), all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“Finishing School was premiered in the American Association of Community Theatre’s AACT NewPlayFest by Elkhart Civic Theatre in Bristol, Ind.”

Finishing School

CHARACTERS

ALFRED: late 60s, barely 70.

WIZZER: much older than Alfred, in a wheelchair (the actor in the role should appear older than Alfred but without use of obvious “old-age makeup”).

MINNIE: 30s.

SHIRLEY: Minnie’s mother.

ANNOUNCEMENT VOICE: either gender, any age. Can be live or recorded.

SETTING: Small park with a bench next to a nice, senior-living facility; basically, this is a park-bench play.

TIME: Now.

SCENES

ACT I:

Scene 1: Monday morning in summer.

Scene 2: Later that same day.

Scene 3: Tuesday morning.

Scene 4: Wednesday morning.

ACT II:

Scene 1: Same day as before.

Scene 2: Thursday morning.

Scene 3: Thursday afternoon.

Finishing School

ACT I

Scene 1

(Lights up on two men. ALFRED is sitting on a park bench. WIZZER is in a wheelchair beside him. AL is reading a broadsheet newspaper [the size of The Dallas Morning News or Houston Chronicle]. WIZZER is nodding off. The pacing in this opening scene is meant to be deliberately relaxed, like Sheriff Andy Taylor and Deputy Barney Fife on the front porch on a hot summer day in Mayberry. Don't rush things. AL lazily turns newspaper pages. The rustling awakens WIZZER.)

WIZZER *(sleepily)*. Whatcha readin'?

AL. Obituaries.

(Beat.)

WIZZER. Am I in 'em?

AL *(offhandedly, turning a page)*. Not today.

WIZZER. Anybody you know in 'em?

AL. Looks like.

WIZZER. Who?

AL. One of our guys died. Ben McManus.

WIZZER. Who?

AL. McManus. Benjamin. From the second floor. T'other end from you. Died Saturday, looks like.

WIZZER. Who?

AL *(a little louder, as if he's used to this)*. Ben. Ben McManus. The Scottish fella. You know him. Big shoulders. Red sideburns. At the Christmas wingding he wore the kilt.

WIZZER. He was killt? Who killt him?

AL. No, you idiot. Kilt! He wore a kilt. The plaid skirt the men in Scotland wear! Forget it. Go back to sleep.

(Beat.)

WIZZER. McManus. From down the hall a'ways. He die, you say?

AL. Yep. Died Saturday. Write-up says it was prostate, among other things. Service is Tuesday at the Episcopal downtown.

WIZZER. That's quite a surprise.

AL. That he died? He was well past 80, for cryin' out loud. Man can't live forever.

WIZZER. Hey, I'm older'n 'at.

AL. You're a young old.

WIZZER *(after a thoughtful beat)*. No, honest to God, Al, all this time I thought that was a woman.

AL. You thought what was a woman?

WIZZER. The redhead in the skirt.

AL. You thought that big Scotsman was a woman? What's the matter with you? Have you gone blind too?

WIZZER. No, Al, honestly all these years, I'd see that red skirt and those fuzzy red muttonchops walk into the Christmas lunch and think, that's a big homely redhead with a facial-hair problem.

AL *(still looking at the paper)*. You're an idiot, Wizzer. You're my best friend here in the asylum. But you're an idiot.

WIZZER. Beg pardon?

AL. Nothing. I'm done. You wanna read 'em? Good bunch of death notices today. Some humdingers.

WIZZER. Oh, goody. Hit the highlights for me.

AL. Okey-dokey. Two start off with the phrase, "Flew home to the arms of Jesus." That's quite a trip.

WIZZER. That it is.

AL. Four were thirty-second-degree Masons.

WIZZER. Well, that shortens the Shriner's parade.

AL. Three are wearing hats in their pictures. Two women in Sunday hats. One fella in a big white Stetson. Two mentions of pets among survivors and/or honorary pallbearers. Benjamin McManus, it appears, is survived by two ex-wives, both named Shirley, and a cockatoo called Robbie Burns.

WIZZER. A bird? He had a bird? How'd he have a bird in here?

AL. I don't know how he had it. He had it. And it appears it has survived him.

WIZZER. Did you know that I bought a goldfish one day here while back at the mall and they confiscated it as contraband? Took it clean away from me. Probably flushed it down the pipe, poor little thing. Still have the empty fish bowl up there on the dresser. Had a little castle with rocks and everything.

AL. That's too bad.

WIZZER. I didn't have her long, but I loved that little fish. People think you can't get attached to any pet except a cat or a dog. But that little fish and me were friends. We really were.

AL. What'dja name it?

WIZZER. What?

AL. The fish! What'dja name the fish?

WIZZER. I don't recall. Barely had it long enough to give it a name. Just got it home from the mall and they jerked it away from me. Whoosh, right down the crapper. Poor little critter.

AL (*handing WIZZER the paper*). Thirty-one.

WIZZER. What?

AL (*louder*). Thirty-one obits today.

WIZZER. Ooh-wee. That's a bunch.

AL. Yep. Well, we did have record heat last week.

WIZZER. Hotter'n the hinges of Hades.

AL. Not too bad today. Probably get hot later but there's a nice breeze right now.

WIZZER. AI?

AL. Yes.

WIZZER. What's today?

AL. Today's Monday, kiddo.

WIZZER. You sure about that?

AL. Says it right there at the top of the page.

WIZZER. You sure that's today's paper?

AL. It's Monday. Yesterday was Sunday. We watched the ball game, don't you remember?

WIZZER. And what'd we do Saturday?

AL. You mean besides not see them wheel old McManus out the back door under a sheet? I don't know what you did. I played online poker for about eight hours. Then I took a nap, ate a pizza and fell asleep watching *Saturday Night Live*.

WIZZER. Sounds good. Who was the host?

AL. No idea. Some singer. Shave-headed. Tattoos.

WIZZER. Patti Page.

AL. No, it wasn't Patti Page. Why would Patti Page be hosting *Saturday Night Live*? "Saturday Night Dead" maybe.

WIZZER. No! I named that little goldfish Patti Page. My favorite singer. Just came to me. Poor little thing. Flushed away in the prime of life. I miss that little booger. I'd like me a pet something-or-other. Something to keep me company in my little apartment.

It's not fair that Scottish gal got to keep her a bird. Not fair a bit.

AL. He was male, you idiot.

WIZZER. I don't care what sex that bird was. It's not fair that I can't have one too.

AL. Getting lonely in your old age?

WIZZER. I 'spect so.

AL. Does your wife know how you feel?

WIZZER. Dotty? Oh, she's all right. Talks a purple streak. I tune her out half the time.

AL. You're both talking to yourselves.

WIZZER. Yeah. (*Beat.*) Fine singer. Yes, she was.

AL. Who?

WIZZER. Patti Page! Who'd you think I was talking about?

AL. Carumba, now I'm doin' it.

WIZZER. Wasn't your son supposed to come down over the weekend?

AL. I don't know.

WIZZER. Now I remember. He was supposed to come by here for lunch. I recall you saying that.

AL. Yeah, well.

WIZZER. Didn't he show up?

AL. He showed up. I didn't answer the door.

WIZZER. Oh, not again. That's a shame. I worry about you, kid. It's not right. He was bringing you the olive branch and you locked him out. You spend too much time by yourself, carrying a grudge. It's not healthy. You can't stay mad forever.

AL. We'll see about that. Hey, let's take a spin down to the corner. Wanna go down to the corner?

WIZZER. Nah.

AL. Dollar Store?

WIZZER. Nope.

AL. Starbucks?

WIZZER. Do I look like I won the lottery?

AL. What's on your dance card then, bud? Can't sit out here all day. We'll fry in the heat. Whatchu wanna do? Let's do something. I'm restless.

WIZZER. I don't know. I'm doin' good just to stay alive, I 'spect.

AL. Well, the Grim Reaper already grabbed one of us this week. That's about average. I say old McManus took one for the team. We're safe. For now.

WIZZER. Remember last winter that one week—

AL. We lost six? A by-god croakathon that week.

WIZZER. What got 'em? I forget.

AL. Staff said it was Hong Kong flu.

WIZZER. Kung fu?

AL (*louder*). No, idiot, BIRD FLU. Epidemic. Everybody was running a fever. Wandering the halls. Mumbling like crazy—more than usual. It was like one flew over the cuckoo's nest in this place.

WIZZER. Who had a cuckoo's nest?

AL. I give up. It's like talking to a hard-of-hearing Muppet.

WIZZER. Six in one week. Lawdy Pete. Was that a record?

AL. I don't think we know who all dies around here. They sneak bodies out the back door at night.

WIZZER. And what killed 'em, you say?

AL. BIRD FLU. *BIRD. FLU.*

WIZZER. You don't have to yell. (*Beat.*) Maybe it was all her fault.

AL. Who?

WIZZER. The Scotch woman. You said she had a bird. Coulda made everybody sick.

AL. Wizz, wouldn't your wife have your lunch ready about now?

WIZZER (*looking at his watch*). Golly Moses, you're right. It's almost 10:45. Usually calls me by now. Where's my phone? (*Feeling for it in his pocket. He finds it and checks it.*) Not yet. She's probably watching TV. Loves that one show with the games and the prizes. Come on down!

AL. Plinko!

AL & WIZZER. PLINKO!

WIZZER. Best part of it. You bet it is. Al?

AL. Yeah, bud?

WIZZER. Was he in the cave? The Scotchman. Did it say? Was he in there, ya reckon?

AL. The cave? I wouldn't think he was. I saw him around a bunch. He seemed to be all there whenever I saw him. But the write-up probably wouldn't say, would it?

WIZZER. Don't want to be in the cave.

AL. Nosirreebob. Do not.

WIZZER. What's it called again?

AL. Officially? The Memory Care Cove.

WIZZER. No memory left, more like.

AL. Yep. Purty much.

WIZZER. Stay outta there.

AL. I'm with ya on that score, kid.

(WIZZER's phone goes off with the ringtone tune of the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive," or something similar.)

WIZZER *(reaching for phone in his pocket)*. Thar she blows. *(Answering.)* Is this my girlfriend? ... Sounds good, honeybun ... Be right up. *(Shuts off phone.)* Mind if I keep that one part of the paper, Al? I like to study those obits after lunch. See if I know anybody besides that Scottish dame.

AL. Go to town, kid. It's the senior citizen's sports page.

WIZZER. See ya later, mashed pah-tater.

*(AL pushes WIZZER to the garden gate and WIZZER exits. As WIZZER leaves, an ANNOUNCEMENT VOICE is heard from a public address system concealed within the garden's fake rocks. This VOICE will recur throughout, like the PA system in M*A*S*H.)*

VOICE *(overly cheerfully, but with a hint of malice)*. Good morning, residents! Today is Monday, June twenty-second. Here are today's announcements. Lunch today in the big dining room is Salisbury steak with gravy, spinach casserole, carrot salad and pineapple tart.

AL (*settling back on the bench to do the crossword puzzle from the newspaper*). That's for the chewers.

VOICE. The alternates are steamed carrots, cream of mushroom soup and rice pudding. This afternoon's exercise in the small gym is chair-robics. And in the big gym, intermediate tai chi. Your sensei, Miss Beverly, says dress to move and wear your nonskid footwear.

AL. So you won't break a hip and have to do chair-robics.

VOICE. Our special entertainment tonight is DoNAL-doh the MagNEE-fico, a local magician who will delight and astound you with his feet—

AL. Idiot.

VOICE. His *feats* of magic. Showtime is five-thirty. The library lady will be here tomorrow with new large-print selections, including new copies of the popular self-help book *The Purpose-Driven Life*—

AL. Grinding to a miserable end—

VOICE. And don't forget our Seniors Prom is coming up! If you never went to your high-school prom or you want to relive that special night, this year's theme is "Never Too Late." So find a date and dust off those dancing shoes.

AL. Shoot me now.

VOICE. Our thought for today is: "The tragedy of old age is not that one is old, but that one is young." Oscar Wilde.

AL. Who died in his 40s.

VOICE. And a request from housekeeping. Do NOT try to flush absorbent undergarments down your toilets. We are presently experiencing a blockage on the second floor that we hope to have repaired over the next few hours. *If* the plumbing crew can locate the source of the problem. That is all!

(*Beat.*)

AL. Patti Page!

(*Blackout/transition.*)

SCENE 2

(Lights up on same park setting later in the day. It is nearly dusk. A young woman, MINNIE, sits on the bench, scrolling through her cellphone. AL appears at the gate, pushing WIZZER into their regular spot, now occupied by the stranger.)

MINNIE *(distractedly)*. Hiya.

WIZZER. Howdy do.

AL. Ahem.

MINNIE. Am I in y'all's way?

AL. Well ...

MINNIE. Scooch in. There's room. Don't mind me. *(She makes room on the bench for AL, who sits close to the edge away from her.)* I'm checking messages. I'm supposed to meet somebody here, but she's late.

AL. Don't say "late" around here. They'll think she's dead.

(WIZZER quickly dozes off in his chair.)

MINNIE *(texting on her phone)*. You fellas live here?

AL. I wouldn't call it livin'. But I eat and sleep here. I come up for parole about two weeks from never.

MINNIE. Aw, it's not that bad, is it? I've seen worse. This is one of the better places, as assisted living goes.

AL *(not too seriously)*. Assisted. Living. That's a good one. More accurately, assisted *dying*. Move in on the fourth floor and work your way down to the loading dock where they stuff you in a box and deliver you to your e-ternal resting place.

MINNIE. Whoa. A realist. Interesting. My name's Minnie, by the way.

(MINNIE sticks out her hand to shake AL's.)

AL. I'm Al. He's Wizzer. Asleep. As usual.

MINNIE. Aw. Is he your roommate? Have y'all lived here long?

AL. Roommate—lord, no. Just a friend. He's a long-timer in this joint. I've been here about eight months, give or take an eon. My son stuck me in here last year when he and his new wife decided I needed "assistance." They stole my house out from under me. But that's another story.

MINNIE. You seem a little too young for ... this place.

AL. I have a portrait aging in an attic. If I'd known I'd live this long—

MINNIE. You'd have taken better care of yourself? Isn't that how the saying goes?

AL. Well, I was gonna say, I wouldn't have stopped smoking. I really enjoyed smoking.

MINNIE. How old is your friend?

AL. Wizzer? No idea. Up there. Just this side of Methuselah. He fought in Korea, so he's way older than me. He has narcolepsy. That's the *best* thing he's got. Falls asleep every few minutes. Makes for some short conversations. But he's just about the only person in this cellblock I can tolerate.

VOICE (*slowly and deliberately*). Good evening, residents. Reminder for our night owls, our late-late movies at 7:30 in the media room are *Four Weddings and a Funeral* and *On Golden Pond*.

AL. Followed by heavy sobbing and an extra dose of antidepressants.

MINNIE (*still looking at her phone*). Hey, you're funny.

AL. I am my generation's Henny Youngman.

MINNIE. Who?

AL. Never mind.

MINNIE (*texting again*). You going to those movies?

AL. Nuuuuuu, not me. I can't watch movies with all these old people. All their hearing aids squealing and everybody going, "What'd they say? What's going on?" The Baptists get mad if there's nudity. The Lutherans get upset if there's cussing. And the old bigots throw a fit if there's black people kissing white people. I've seen better behavior at dog fights.

(*MINNIE checks her phone again.*)

AL. Who ya meetin' out here? Your grandma?

MINNIE. My mother, actually. My father died here over the weekend and she's meeting me to help clear out some of his things. Maybe you knew him ... Benjamin—

AL. McManus? Aw, good man. I'm very sorry for your loss, Miss ... Miss ... you told me ...

MINNIE. Minnie. Minnie McManus. I know. It sounds like Minnie Mouse. When I get married I'm taking *his* name.

AL. You engaged?

MINNIE. *No*. But I'm on the market, if you know anyone under 40.

AL. Well ... I'll, uh ... yeah. You know, your daddy was a right nice fellow. I didn't even know he was ailing.

MINNIE. He had heart problems for a long time. And then the prostate stuff. But he was strong as an ox. And a real sweetie.

AL. So you're Shirley's daughter?

MINNIE. You know my mom?

AL. No. I read the obit. The two Shirleys and everything.

MINNIE. My mom is Shirley two, his second wife. She and Dad divorced when I was younger—she was a bit of a handful for him, I think. She was his late-in-life fling that turned into a crazy marriage. I think I was a surprise. They divorced but they were still friends right to the end. Talked all the time. She's supposed to be meeting me here after work. Like, twenty minutes ago.

AL. Who gets the bird?

MINNIE. What bird?

AL. Ben's bird. Robbie Burns. You taking him home?

MINNIE. I guess I'll have to unless Mom wants it. I hadn't really thought about it. Dad had some books and pictures and things he wanted me to have, she said. I didn't even know about a bird. I never really visited him here. My mom or somebody would pick him up and drive him out to the house for holidays and birthdays.

WIZZER (*sleepily*). Yeah, Patti Page. I loved that old song.

MINNIE. I'm sorry. What?

AL. Don't mind him. He's in la la land.

WIZZER (*singing softly*). How much is that ... de dah dah dee dah dah.

AL. That doggie in the window? Go back to sleep, Wizz.

WIZZER (*waking up a little*). Who's this? Hey, there. You're a pretty little thing, ain'tcha?

AL. This is old McManus' daughter. Minnie Mouse... oh, damn it.

MINNIE. Minnie. My name's Minnie. Nice to meet you, sir.

WIZZER. Minnie? Like the Moocher?

MINNIE. I'm sorry?

WIZZER. Minnie the Moocher... She was a low-down hoochie coocher ... What was his name again, Al? I always forget. You know the one. Did that number with that band.

AL. Cab Calloway.

WIZZER. Yeah, that was it. Cab Calloway.

MINNIE. You lost me there.

AL. It's an old song. "Minnie the Moocher." Cab Calloway sang it.

MINNIE. Oh, yeah. I've heard of that.

AL. Don't mind him. Wizzer's brain is like an old pan of Jiffy Pop.

MINNIE. Does he have, you know ... ?

AL. Alzheimer's? Not completely. More like *Almost*heimer's. He's old. I'm old. We all get something. That's the one thing you do NOT want to get. Hey, you want me to go look for Shirley numero duo for you? If you'll keep the buzzards off old Wizzer here, I'll step inside and they can page her.

MINNIE. No, that's all right. She just texted that she's on her way. Shouldn't be long.

AL. I do not text.

MINNIE. No?

AL. Don't have a cellphone.

MINNIE. Gosh, I'd die without mine. How do you, you know—connect with people?

AL. Nobody to call. Nobody calls me. Don't need it.

MINNIE. Not even your kids? How do they get in touch?

AL. Just my son. He has my home number. He has my home, too. But that's another story.

MINNIE. You said you'd been here how long?

AL. Since last fall. Time flies—

MINNIE. When you're having fun?

AL. No. Time flies when you're old. Just goes by. Like this (*Snaps.*) and you jump from 40 to 80. Enjoy it while you can, young lady. Before everything starts to hurt. Before everybody starts dying.

MINNIE. Golly.

AL. Oh, sorry. No disrespect to your Daddy. How old are you, if you don't mind me asking? I'd guess 30s?

MINNIE. You guess right.