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## **Family Plays**

# MARTIN SAID SO

DRAMA BY  
WANDA SCHELL AND KENNY BENTO



# MARTIN SAID SO

“One of the best plays I’ve seen dealing with my father’s philosophy.” (Martin Luther King III)

“A most entertaining, informative and powerful performance.” (Thomas E. Martin, Director of Human Relations, Allentown, Pa.)

“Thank you for ... giving me, America, and the world a work of art ... that sparks our memory, challenges our consciences and encourages our hearts.” (Dr. Daniel W. Brown, associate professor of German drama, Tufts University)

**Drama. By Wanda Schell and Kenny Bento.** *Cast: 5m., 3w.* *Martin Said So* was born out of a request by the Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor’s Commission for Dr. Martin Luther King Week. Although ideally suitable for presentation around Dr. King’s birthday in January and Black History Month in February, it is enjoyable and appropriate for any time of year. The play tells the story of four generations of an American family of African descent as they were affected by the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. When Evelyn Shaw, an African-American student at an Ivy League college, refuses to serve on a committee to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday, her great-grandmother can’t understand why. With flashbacks, the great-grandmother describes the struggles of her family. Evelyn’s father was an admirer of Malcolm X and joined the Black Muslims; her uncle went to Alabama to march with Dr. King. The brothers clashed frequently over the philosophies of the two black leaders. The authors blend an unbelievable amount of factual information into the fast-moving plot. With strong emotion and dramatic conflict, the play shows how the philosophies of both Dr. King and Malcolm X changed the family’s life. In the end, Evelyn is proud of her heritage, and the audience is given a sensitive, factual review with strong emotion and dramatic conflict of the impact of Dr. King’s work on today’s society. The historical facts are presented frankly and fairly, and this important play will be applauded by all ethnicities. It was premiered by Theatre for Emily in Providence, Rhode Island. *Set: Shaw home. Time: 1950s and 60s. Approximate running time: 40 to 45 minutes. SFX CD available. Code: ML8.*

## Family Plays

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Martin Said So

# **MARTIN SAID SO**

**A Drama**

**By**

**WANDA SCHELL and KENNY BENTO**

**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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## MARTIN SAID SO

### *Cast*

(In order of appearance)

#### In the Present

**Evelyn Shaw**, a black student at an Ivy League college  
**Ray Feldman**, a white student at the same college  
**Nanny (Olivia Shaw)**, Evelyn's great-grandmother

#### In the 1950's & '60's

**Samuel David Shaw**, Evelyn's grandfather  
**Ruth**, Samuel David's wife  
**Gregory**, their son  
**Richard**, their son  
**Police Officer**



The play takes place in the Shaw home in the northern part of the U. S. A. The time shifts back and forth between the present and the 1950's and '60's.



First presented by the Theatre for Emily in Providence, Rhode Island, with the following cast:

Evelyn Shaw .....	Wanda Schell
Ray/Police Officer .....	Mark Feldman
Nanny .....	Verna Raffini Naar
Samuel David .....	John Spencer
Ruth .....	Amirah Nurridin
Gregory .....	S. Brian Jones
Richard .....	Angelo Maurice Schell

## ABOUT THE PLAY

*Martin Said So* was born out of a request by the Rhode Island Lieutenant Governor's Commission for Dr. Martin Luther King Week. Although ideally suitable for presentation around Dr. King's birthday in January and Black History Month (February), it is enjoyable and appropriate for any time of year.

The play tells the story of four generations of an American family of African descent as they were affected by the Civil Rights movements of the 1950's and 1960's. The authors blend an unbelievable amount of factual information into the fast-moving plot. With strong emotion and dramatic conflict, the play shows how the philosophies of both Dr. King and Malcolm X changed the family's life. The historical facts are presented frankly and fairly, emphasizing Dr. King's dream of a nation without prejudice but also without violence. A powerful play, it should enthrall audiences of all races—and perhaps take another step toward bringing peace and love to all Americans.

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### Critical Comments

"One of the best plays I've seen dealing with my father's philosophy."—Martin Luther King III

"Let me commend you on your ability to balance the impersonal historical exposition of Dr. King's impact on the American macrocosm with the personal dialogues that present his impact on an individual family . . . Thank you for . . . giving me, America, and the world a work of art . . . that sparks our memory, challenges our consciences and encourages our hearts."—Dr. Daniel W. Brown, associate professor of German Drama, Tufts University

"I couldn't have asked for a better way to kick off our year-long program, 'A World of Difference,' than to have this most entertaining, informative, and powerful performance."—Thomas E. Martin, Director of Human Relations, Allentown, Pa.

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Prior to publication, *Martin Said So* was toured throughout Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Maryland.

Playing time is 40-60 minutes.

A **video tape** of the Theatre for Emily premiere is available from the publisher. Also available is a **sound effects tape** with background music and effects used in the premiere. For information and prices write or phone I. E. Clark Publications, PO Box 246, Schulenburg, TX 78956-0246 (phone 979-743-3232)

Background music courtesy of Mrs. Bernice Johnson Neagon and the Smithsonian Collection of Recordings.

## **THEATRE FOR EMILY**

Theatre for Emily was founded as a non-profit educational theatre company in 1985 by its executive director, Wanda Gwendolyn Schell. The aim of the company is to increase awareness of and educate persons in the community about social issues and cultural topics through the media of live theatre and workshops. Theatre for Emily has dealt with such issues as civil rights, alcohol and drug abuse, teen pregnancy, prejudice, and AIDS. The organization has completed successful tours of schools, colleges, and community theatres and civic groups throughout Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Florida. Home base for Theatre for Emily is Providence, Rhode Island.

Wanda Schell is an actress, dancer, writer, and storyteller. A graduate of Rhode Island College with a bachelor of arts in theatre, she has performed with numerous theatre companies, including Looking Glass Theatre, Langston Hughes Center for the Arts, and Rites and Reason Theatre, Brown University. She has an underlying dedication to the development of educational theatre in commemoration of her late grandmother, Emily Louise Costello, for whom Theatre for Emily was named.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### *Properties*

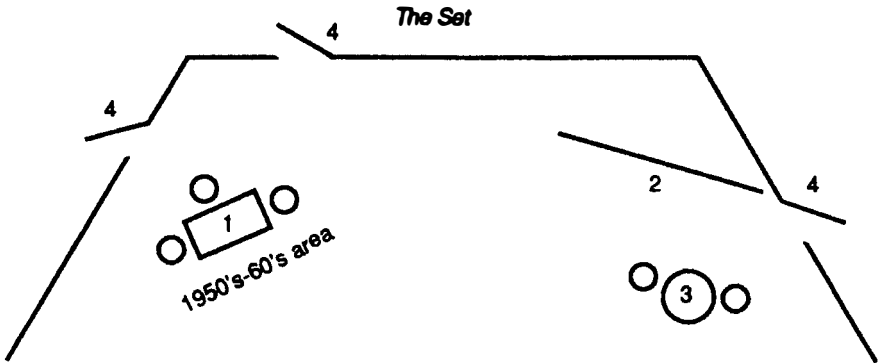
Small radio and repair tools—Samuel David  
 Platter of food—Ruth  
 Cup—Gregory (in drunk/beggar scene)

### *Costumes*

Nanny wears a house dress and shawl; she has gray hair. Evelyn enters in an attractive street dress. Ray wears casual Ivy League classroom clothes. Samuel David has on blue jeans, neat but worn, and a work shirt. Ruth wears a house dress and apron. Gregory has on a sport coat, slacks, and a tie—loosened at the collar. Richard wears a black shirt, dark sweater, and dark slacks; later, he changes into a colorful African national costume.

### *Lighting and Background Sound Effects*

The lights focus on the group speaking while dimmed on the opposite side of the stage. Only a few sound effects are needed: banjo music, a radio news announcement, and riots.



- 1—Table with checkered tablecloth and chairs (may be slightly behind the other area or on a platform)
- 2—Screen with pictures on wall, including a large one of Martin Luther King
- 3—Table and chairs
- 4—Doors

## MARTIN SAID SO

*[As House Lights dim, a VOICE comes from the darkened stage:]*

VOICE. "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity. Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or the darkness of destructive selfishness. This is the judgment. Life's most persistent and urgent question is: 'What are you doing for others?'" These are the words of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

*[The CURTAIN OPENS on the comfortably furnished family room of a two-story row house. It is early evening. The time is the present. EVELYN, a black woman in her early twenties, and RAY, a white man about the same age, enter. They have been arguing]*

RAY. Well why not?

EVELYN. I told you why.

RAY. But that's no excuse.

EVELYN. Look, I don't have to explain myself to you.

RAY. Yes, you do. This committee is very important to me, and I would think that something like this would be important to you, too.

EVELYN. What you really mean is, just because I'm black I should jump at the chance to work for free.

RAY. I can't talk to you, you're crazy. . .

EVELYN. Don't call me crazy—you got a lot of nerve coming in my house calling me crazy. You're the one who's crazy. . . *[NANNY enters]*

NANNY. Girl, what you fussin' about now?

EVELYN. Hi, Nanny. *[Kisses her on the cheek]*

NANNY. And who is this you fussin' with?

EVELYN. This is Ray and he was just leaving.

NANNY. Hello, Ray. You'll have to excuse Evelyn—she sometimes forgets and leaves her manners out there in the streets. I'm Olivia Shaw, this ill-mannered child's great-grandmother.

RAY. I've been looking forward to meeting you, Mrs. Shaw. I'm Ray Feldman. *[EVELYN exits in a huff]*

NANNY. Well, it's nice to meet you too, Ray. Won't you have a seat?

RAY. Thank you.

NANNY. You been knowin' my Evelyn long?

RAY. Not long; we met this semester. We're taking a Black History course together.

NANNY. Is that so? The way you two was arguin' when you first come in here, I thought you'd of known each other for years.

RAY. Evelyn can be pretty stubborn at times.

NANNY. Don't I know it. What's she being stubborn about today?

RAY. Our school is sponsoring an all-day birthday celebration for Dr. Martin Luther King and I could really use Evelyn's help on the planning committee. *[EVELYN returns]*

EVELYN. And I already told you that I don't have time to work on your precious committee.

NANNY. Why can't you *make* time to help out, baby girl?

EVELYN. Oh come on, Nanny, don't you start in on me, too.

NANNY. I don't understand you, girl—you ought to be glad to work on something like that after all the good things that man has done to help folks.

EVELYN. Why should I be glad to work on something that's going to take up all of my time, and I'm not getting paid for it?

NANNY. You a selfish little thing, you know that? What you got to do with your time except sashayin' around that college tryin' to be cute. If it wasn't for Dr. King, you probably wouldn't even be able to go to that fancy school.

EVELYN. Oh please, Nanny, let's not fight—okay? I'm just too busy to take on all the responsibility of a committee.

NANNY. Well what about all the responsibility it took to organize marches and demonstrations, and them . . . rides.

RAY. Freedom Rides.

NANNY. That's right, not to mention all the other good things Dr. King did. None of that was easy work—it took a lot of time and responsibilities.

EVELYN. I know that, Nanny—now let's just drop it!

NANNY. You a smart-mouth little something, ain't ya? You don't care about nothing but yourself. I wonder where black folks would be today if Dr. King had of felt like you do.

EVELYN. I think it's okay to celebrate his birthday, but I really

don't think it's necessary to dig up the past. Who wants to be reminded of lynching and Jim Crow laws?

RAY. I think it's important that we never forget any of it. We have to work hard to make sure nothing like that ever happens again.

EVELYN. But none of that *is* going to happen again. Look around you. This is \_\_\_\_\_ [*use current year*]*—*most people don't know what Jim Crow laws were, and if you look around real good, you'll see that there are no lynchings in this neighborhood.

RAY. But the point is . . .

EVELYN. *The point is*, this is \_\_\_\_\_ [*current year*] *—*I am a black woman attending an Ivy League school, no one is calling me "nigger" or burning crosses on my lawn, so that tells me that the movement is dead. So let's just let it stay buried!

RAY. You're wrong about that, Evelyn.

EVELYN. What do you know about it—you're white.

NANNY. Evelyn!!

RAY. I know you're crazy if you think the movement is dead. Look at what happened at Howard Beach, and in Bensonhurst, not to mention what's going on in South Africa [*update allusions as desired*]. Maybe you better spend a few extra years in that Ivy League school you're so proud of because there's still a whole lot that has to be done before the movement is dead.

EVELYN. Then let someone else do it because *I don't have the time*. Now if you feel that you've got to prove something to black folks, why don't you spend the rest of *your* dull life telling folks what has to be done—*I don't have the time!*

RAY. I don't have to prove anything to anybody!!! But you evidently have a lot of growing up to do. Perhaps I should be leaving now. Good-night, Mrs. Shaw.

EVELYN. 'Bye.

NANNY. Sit down, Ray. Don't let Evelyn upset you.

EVELYN. Nanny, don't tell him that!

NANNY. Evelyn, hush. Ray is right, you do have a lot of growin' up to do, and now is as good a time as any, so you sit your little narrow behind down 'cause I'm gonna give you a lesson in Black History.

EVELYN. I've been in school all day, Nanny—I really don't need any more lessons.

NANNY. What you need is a good spanking, something to wake you up and get your nose out of the clouds. I've been watching you,

girl, and ever since you started going to college, you been walking around acting like you've forgotten that you are black.

EVELYN. Nanny, that's not fair.

NANNY. Well, whether it is or isn't, it's the truth. And it's time you learned about your history and then maybe you won't be so quick to say that Dr. King and the Civil Rights movement ain't got nothing to do with you.

EVELYN. Nanny, that's not fair!

NANNY. Sit down and listen! Ray, you might want to be gettin' on home now.

RAY. If you don't mind, I'd really like to stay and listen to what you have to say, unless, of course, this is a personal matter.

EVELYN. It is.

NANNY. If you want to stay you're more than welcome. *[EVELYN glares at Ray]* Now, I'm going to start this story from the beginning. You remember when you was just a little girl and you use to come into my room and ask me to tell you about that picture of that man I keep on my wall?

EVELYN. Yes, and you told me that he was my great-grandfather, and that he died of a real bad sickness.

NANNY. Yes, but what I didn't tell you, Miss Mouth, was that sickness that killed him was prejudice.

EVELYN. I don't understand.

NANNY. *[Perhaps BANJO music is heard faintly in the background]* You see, baby, me and your great-grandfather— *[to Ray]* ~~Arth~~ David Shaw—lived in the backwoods of Mississippi, and we was real happy back there in them woods. And when I gave birth to your grandfather— *[to Ray]* Samuel David—we had everything we ever wanted. But our happiness didn't last long. Some of them white folks down there couldn't stand the fact that my Arthur was a hard-working and honest man, and he didn't back down from nothin' and nobody. So they started threatening us, told us they were gonna teach us how to be good niggers instead of uppity ones. And right after Samuel David's second birthday, they come to our house, late at night, dressed up in white sheets and hoods coverin' their faces.

RAY. Mrs. Shaw, are you talking about the Ku Klux Klan?

NANNY. That's right. Arthur grabbed his rifle and told me to take the baby and hide in the woods. I begged him to come with us, but he wouldn't.

RAY. What did he do?

NANNY. Arthur tried to fight them off but there was just too many of 'em. I was hiding in the dark, watching them, crying. I never felt so helpless in my life. They beat him half to death, then they dragged him to a tree and hung him. But that still wasn't enough. They made a roaring bonfire and they sat around laughing and drinking and screaming at the top of their lungs— "We gonna roast us a nigger tonight," and then [*choking with emotion and memory*] they threw his beautiful black body into that fire and burned him to ashes.

EVELYN. [*Putting her arms around her great-grandmother*] Oh, Nanny, I'm so sorry. [*There is an uneasy silence*]

RAY. Oh my goodness, would you look at the time—uh—the meeting should be starting any minute now . . . Well, uh, good-night, Mrs. Shaw. Evelyn.

NANNY. [*Crossing with RAY as he exits*] Good-night, Ray—don't you be no stranger. [*Crossing back into the room she notices EVELYN glaring at the door through which Ray has just exited*] Girl, what are you glaring at that poor man like that for?

EVELYN. He's white and it was his people who did those terrible things to my great-grandfather . . .

NANNY. No, baby, it was some people of his color who done them things, and that was a long time past. That boy ain't done nothin'. That's the kind of attitude that Dr. King was fighting to change.

EVELYN. But Nanny, they killed your husband and my great-grandfather . . .

NANNY. Well, child, maybe now you won't be so quick to talk about forgettin' your past, and you'll stop acting like you're ashamed of your color.

EVELYN. Nanny, I know where I came from and I'm not ashamed of my color.

NANNY. Well, baby girl, sometimes you act like you are. I told you that story to try and make you understand the kind of hate and prejudice Dr. King was trying to change. You young college kids don't know the kind of prejudice we lived through.

EVELYN. Yes, I've heard about it.

NANNY. It was different after I moved up here. We couldn't eat in fancy restaurants and there were lots of other signs of prejudice—but there weren't no Jim Crow laws and separate schools. I worked hard. I



lost a few jobs at first, because of my attitude. I couldn't stand the sight of white people—whenever I was near one I smelled burning flesh. After a while I was able to hide my attitude. Samuel David went to school and graduated from high school just like Arthur wanted him to. He went to work and together we bought this house. He met your Grandma Ruth and after they got married, Ruth gave birth to two sons. Your daddy and your Uncle Gregory. They was both born in this house.

EVELYN. Nanny, tell me about my parents and Uncle Gregory. Whenever I ask Grandma and Grandpa, they just brush me off—it's like they don't want to talk about them. I know my mom died when I was a baby, but that's all I know. How come after all these years no one will talk to me about them?

NANNY. Well baby, I guess I put off tellin' you 'cause I been tryin' to protect you. But I see now that the time has come for you to learn the truth, and then maybe you'll see why it's important for you to help in any way you can to keep Dr. King's dream alive.

EVELYN. But I don't understand what this has to do with my parents.

NANNY. Well, if you stop flappin' your gums and listen for a minute, I'll explain. Now where was I? Oh yeah, your father and your Uncle Gregory, they both graduated from high school, and they both were supposed to go to college. But your daddy met your mama and before long they *had* to get married. Now you know your grandfather didn't approve of that, so your daddy took your mama to New York to live. But your mama wasn't very strong and when you was only six months old, she died. Your daddy brought you back here to live. Not too much later, your Uncle Gregory came home from school. He was going to Temple University studying law, and he came in here all out of breath and excited.

*[NANNY and EVELYN freeze as FOCUS shifts to another area of the stage, where SAMUEL DAVID and his wife RUTH are seated at a table]*

GREGORY. *[Entering]* Hey, Pop, did you hear about it? It was in the papers and on the news . . .

SAMUEL DAVID. *[He is repairing a small radio]* What you babblin' 'bout now?

GREGORY. The big boycott that Dr. King is organizing.