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Dramatic Publishing

THE CONFLICT



Drama
by
Jeb Rosebrook

Jeb Rosebrook's stage adaptation
of his "Waltons" episode is
absolutely timeless.

THE CONFLICT– *Drama. By Jeb Rosebrook. Adapted from his episode of the same title for "The Waltons" television series. Cast: 13m., 7w., 8 or more extras.* This play is based on true events occurring in the 1930s when federally funded road construction for Virginia's Blue Ridge Parkway legally forced many families in those mountains from their homes. The Walton family and their eldest son, John Boy, are summoned by a Walton matriarch, Aunt Martha Corrine, to help her family fight forcible eviction from the only land they have ever known. John Boy will learn that his belief in a peaceful solution and in taking an unpopular stand could put his life at risk. Faced with changing times and an uncertain future, their way of life may be altered forever. *The Conflict* is the timeless story of family, of caring, of courage and hope in the face of losing what was so important to the Blue Ridge people of their time. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: CG9.*

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THE CONFLICT

An adaptation
by
JEB ROSEBROOK

From the television series “The Waltons”
created by Earl Hamner Jr.



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THE CONFLICT

CHARACTERS

WADE WALTON, 19
VERA WALTON, 18, pregnant
JOHN BOY AS A MAN (EARL HAMNER), narrator
MARTHA CORRINE, late 80s
JOHN WALTON, 39
OLIVIA, 37
GRANDPA WALTON, 70
GRANDMA WALTON, 65
JOHN BOY, 17
MARY ELLEN, 13
ELIZABETH, 9
ERIN, 12
BEN, 10
JIM BOB, 8
JASON, 15
SLIM, construction foreman, 20s-30s
BOONE WALTON, 69
SENATOR LUCAS AVERY, nearing 70
BLAKE, road builder, 40s
SENATOR ROGERS
SENATOR BURGESS
TWO U.S. MARSHALS, 30s and 40s (non-speaking)
SIX BULLDOZER OPERATORS/CONSTRUCTION WORK-
ERS (non-speaking)
WORKER WITH SIGN late teens (non-speaking)
WATER BOY (non-speaking)
AMBULANCE TEAM

SET

For our sets stage R and stage L, we utilize a skeletal structure of two-by-fours, arranged so that by shifting the lighting we can suggest areas such as the woods, Martha Corinne's home, the Walton home. Props such as a bench, a spinning wheel, a gun or a tombstone might simply be brought in by an actor while the lights are low. With this kind of design we need not have so many props.

Stage L will serve as Martha Corinne's home. She and those who live with her, Wade and Vera, and her son, Boone, live in a far more primitive manner than John Walton's family, a step back in time to a frontier culture.

Stage R will serve as the Walton home. Center stage will serve as a communal ground which can be the woods, Martha Corinne's garden, the cemetery, pigpen, the Walton front yard, Blue Rock Creek, etc.

Below the stage apron will also be a communal area, to be utilized as necessary.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The stage is dark and without a curtain. We hear a young woman's voice softly singing "Barbara Allen," crossing to center stage.*

AT RISE: *As lights slowly come up, the singing stops. The couple, WADE and VERA WALTON, who is four months pregnant, are in an embrace. Abruptly we hear a muffled distant explosion.*

VERA (*afraid*). Wade.

WADE. You remember what I told you. (*Hesitantly, she nods.*) This land is our birthright. (*He gently kisses her. A second distant explosion.*) I love you, Vera. Oh, how I love you.

(They hurry on their way. As they exit stage R, lights dim center stage. A single light illuminates stage L. JOHN BOY AS A MAN (EARL HAMNER) steps on-stage. Like the stage manager in Our Town, he will serve as our narrator, setting the place and moment, personalizing our story from one who looks back into time.)

JOHN BOY AS A MAN (EARL HAMNER). When I was growing up in Nelson County, I always dreamed that one day I'd become a writer. In those early stories I wrote about kings and queens and magic and drama in faraway places. It was only when I grew up that I realized that the magic was here in these foothills of the Blue Ridge we call the Ragged Mountains and that the drama was in my own home and family.

(Lights come up stage L. We are in Martha Corinne's home. MARTHA, a weathered, strong, yet almost fragile woman, is working at her spinning wheel, humming as she works. She wears a plain, long dress and high-top shoes. Her great oak walking stick stands in the corner, an old straw hat nearby. On her ring finger she wears a thin gold wedding band.)

I had a tendency to think of myself and my immediate family as the only Waltons. But that wasn't true. We were part of a great clan. There were other Waltons who lived farther up in the Blue Ridge who had been in Nelson County for over a hundred years. They were part of the family whose ways had scarcely been touched by the passing of time.

(Lights dim on MARTHA CORINNE. Lights come up center stage where the WALTON FAMILY: JOHN, OLIVIA, GRANDPA, GRANDMA, JOHN BOY, MARY ELLEN, ELIZABETH, ERIN, BEN, JIM BOB and JASON, is enjoying a picnic in an idyllic setting. The meal is nearly finished. JASON softly plays a tune on his harmonica. The skeletal silhouette of the Walton truck, an

indication of trees and a narrow dirt road, once a trail, are in background.)

We were a family born to share a kinship with the season, always gratefully accepting that which the land gave but living with the knowledge that weather and misfortune could take it away. One summer we were to learn that man also could take away what the land had given.

(Lights dim stage L, the NARRATOR exits.)

OLIVIA *(to JOHN)*. I can't remember a picnic I've enjoyed more. Thank you for giving us all the day off.

JOHN. Seemed like a good time, what with school starting so soon.

GRANDMA. It's been a fine day...a day I'll remember in heaven.

GRANDPA. I hope you aren't planning on going to heaven anytime soon, old woman.

GRANDMA. I'm in no hurry, old man.

(OLIVIA rests her head on JOHN's shoulder, as JASON's harmonica eases into the hymn, "Gather at the River.")

OLIVIA *(joins in, singing)*.

"Shall we gather at the river,
where bright angel feet have trod..."

(JOHN, MARY ELLEN, JOHN BOY, ELIZABETH, GRANDPA and GRANDMA join in singing.)

"With its crystal tide forever,

Flowing by the throne of God?
Yes, we'll gather at the river,
the beautiful, beautiful river..."

(As they sing we are aware of an approaching truck, which stops, motor idling, just offstage L. The WALTONS look curiously in that direction. Singing fades.)

"Gather with the saints at the river,
That flows by the throne of God."

(SLIM, a construction foreman, enters. SEVERAL OTHER MEN with axes and bucksaws move into background to begin work.)

SLIM. I reckon you folks had best be moving on. Road work's coming through here.

(Work begins in background.)

JOHN *(stands)*. Now hold on here. We got a right to picnic where we want. You can't just show up, order us to leave.

(A WORKER brings out a sign, places it. Other trucks, the sound of caterpillar tractors offstage.)

U.S. Government and the Commonwealth of Virginia
Construction of Blue Ridge Park and Blue Ridge Parkway
To be completed July 1936

SLIM (*points to sign*). Maybe I can't. But President Franklin Roosevelt and the whole damn government of these United States most surely can. And is.

(SLIM joins his crew. The work is hard, men sweat. A WATER BOY brings a bucket and a dipper. The family mood changes. Offstage the whine of caterpillar tractors at work. Dust from work sweeps across stage.)

ELIZABETH. Today was supposed to be fun.

JOHN BOY. It's that big park and highway we've been hearing so much about.

OLIVIA. Reckon it will be a nice place for a Sunday ride, if they ever finish it. Mary Ellen, Elizabeth, help me get us packed up here.

GRANDPA. Was a nice place to drive to before they started it.

(All start moving through the dust toward their truck, with JOHN BOY, JOHN and GRANDPA bringing the food, etc.)

JOHN. That's nothing but a bumpy old road, Pa.

GRANDMA. Bumpy. But peaceful. Your pa's saying the peaceful part is of more importance to him.

MARY ELLEN. Like today almost was.

JASON (*looking off*). Look at those big tractors, will you? Listen to that power. Reckon it's like driving an airplane.

(JOHN BOY hangs behind a moment, looking off.)

MARY ELLEN (*facetiously*). Trees wouldn't have a chance with you, Jason. If you couldn't push 'em down, you'd be bombing them.

(Stage lights dim on the others as work continues. Stage L, JOHN BOY looks at the ongoing work, the old road, the trees.)

JOHN BOY. This is going to be a fine modern highway. *(Tractors, sawing, the sound of a tree falling. Stage is growing dark. He turns and starts after the others.)* When it's finished it's going to connect up with the Great Smokey Mountains, all the way down in Tennessee.

(Stage R lights slowly illuminate BOONE WALTON and his grandson, WADE, standing before the skeletal outline of a 1920s-model stake-bed truck. BOONE wears an old sweat-stained slim-brimmed hat. WADE, hatless, wears bib overalls, his sleeves rolled to the biceps, revealing the tattooed figure of a hula dancer; beneath which is written "Aloha - 1933." These are lean, quiet mountain men, who speak with their eyes. Offstage L the sound of the Walton truck. Lights illuminate the exterior of the Walton home. The family piles out of the truck. BOONE and WADE move toward them.)

GRANDPA. Boone! We was just up on the old Ridgeline Road.

BOONE. It's been a while since you was up our way. *(Takes off his hat.)* For those of you who don't know him, meet Wade Walton, my grandson. He's been away with the Navy.

JOHN. Nice to see you, Wade. Been a long time. Reckon you all remember your cousin Boone from up on the Blue Rock.

OLIVIA. Hello, Boone...Wade.

BOONE. Mama sent us.

GRANDPA (*a beat*). And I have a pretty good suspicion why.

WADE. She told us to be speaking with the men of the house.

(The family members exchange looks. JOHN looks to GRANDPA, then back to BOONE and WADE.)

JOHN. Then let's get to the talking.

(The family starts inside. JOHN BOY's look shows he wants to be included, so he remains just to the side. ELIZABETH tugs on her mother's skirt, glances back at BOONE.)

ELIZABETH. How can he be my cousin if he's so old?

OLIVIA. I'll explain it to you later.

(The door closes, JOHN BOY still wanting to be a part of this. And BOONE, rolling a cigarette with tobacco from a can of Velvet tobacco, begins:)

BOONE. Man name of Blake. He's the builder. The United State government brought him in from building high-ways out West. "Move on," Blake says, "you got to move on. This here property of yours is condemned for

reasons of a public park. Pack up and get relocated,” he tells us.

GRANDPA. To where?

BOONE. Flatland country. Says the government’s built houses for us down there.

JOHN. And you don’t choose to move.

GRANDPA. Of course they don’t choose to move. Martha Corinne Walton is planted in that land like an oak tree.

BOONE. Others can move if they want. Not us.

WADE. I come home from the Navy. And home is where I plan on staying.

BOONE. Mama and me, Wade and his Vera, we decided on staying.

GRANDPA. If I know Martha Corinne, she didn’t just send you down here to tell us that.

WADE. She says you’re blood-kin Waltons.

GRANDPA *(to JOHN)*. She’ll make a stand, bless her heart.

BOONE. She said you wouldn’t forget your own people. Not when they need you.

GRANDPA. Remember that, John Boy. It’s a clan you belong to.

JOHN BOY. I know, Grandpa.

(For the first time, WADE is aware of one near his own age, and his statement, like his eyes, includes JOHN BOY.)

WADE. Won’t be long before the government comes, trying to move us out. They already commenced blasting.

BOONE. Shaping our mountains to suit themselves. (*Eyes GRANDPA and JOHN.*) Martha Corinne says you come up there to fight with us. You be there. Tomorrow.

(BOONE starts toward the stake-bed truck. WADE turns to follow. JOHN moves after them.)

JOHN (*reacts*). To fight the government?

BOONE (*stops, turns*). If it comes to that.

GRANDPA. You tell her we'll be there.

BOONE. Bring your rifles.

(BOONE and WADE move to their truck. WADE turning.)

WADE. Lucky they missed your place when they drew up that park map.

(Stage lights on GRANDPA, JOHN and JOHN BOY. We hear the offstage sound of BOONE and WADE's truck driving away.)

GRANDPA. You heard them, John. Our obligation is clear.

JOHN. Sure it is, Pa. But we're not taking any rifles up there with us. (*He starts toward the house.*)

GRANDPA. Son. (*JOHN pauses.*) Sooner or later it'll come to a fight. (*JOHN heads into the house. GRANDPA looks to JOHN BOY.*) One day soon, might be too late.

(Stage is dark, save for lights burning in a second-story room of the Walton house, indicated as John Boy's

room. JOHN BOY sits at an indicated desk writing in his journal. Downstairs remains dark.)

JOHN BOY. “All along I’ve been recording small events in our daily lives. But after the meeting we all had with Boone and Wade, this one looks to be out of the ordinary. Nothing like it has ever happened before.” *(Pauses, looks downstairs.)* “Every minute there’s a new development...”

(JOHN BOY’s room darkens on his look downstairs. Lights come up downstairs where JOHN, OLIVIA, GRANDPA and GRANDMA are involved in an emotional, animated discussion of the afternoon’s visit by BOONE and WADE.)

OLIVIA. Rifles. Fighting the government...

JOHN. ...Liv, I won’t argue with you, not about the rifles...

OLIVIA. ...Have you men lost your senses?

JOHN. ...But our staying away isn’t going to help them, either.

(We see JOHN BOY making his way downstairs. There, he will pause, listening.)

GRANDPA. My dead brother is buried in those mountains...

GRANDMA. ...Use your common sense, old man...

GRANDPA. ...and I intend on going up there to do what I can.

GRANDMA. ...Everyone in this family knows Boone Walton. Like his father before him, and his mother, he's never backed away from a fight in his life.

OLIVIA. And the talking always comes later. Well, I'm not going to let you go up there and get yourselves shot.

JOHN. No one's yet said anything about shooting.

(JOHN BOY knows he must say something, be a part of this. He steps into the room.)

JOHN BOY. What I was thinking, Daddy, is maybe it's not too late to get a lawyer.

JOHN. Maybe. I'll decide when I get up there.

OLIVIA. John. It isn't our business.

JOHN. Martha Corinne is a Walton. Now regardless how either of you two feel about her and Boone, Pa and I are going up there.

GRANDMA. That old woman beckons and you two come running.

GRANDPA. I would have gone on any account, if I thought somebody was trying to chase her off her land.

JOHN BOY. Daddy. Grandpa. I'd like to go with you.

JOHN. Thanks, son, but this is for me and your grandpa to handle.

OLIVIA. You're wrong. *(Includes GRANDPA.)* Both of you. Because if you're going, we're all going.

JOHN. Liv, this needn't involve you...

OLIVIA. ...You said this was family, didn't you? Well, we're going to make it family. If you two go, we all go.