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Family Plays

ALKY

A play about teens and alcohol

Drama by
JEROME McDONOUGH



ALKY

“How many more will have suffered by the time you read this? Do me a favor—stay whole and alive.” (Jerome McDonough)

“Once again, congratulations for a wonderful new play.” (Caterina O’Brien, John Carroll High School, Fort Pierce, Fla.)

“We were able to do 17 performances, which included junior high schools—we made the front page!” (Valerie D. Boyd, North High School, Downers Grove, Ill.)

“The play was dedicated to Trisky Tuggle, a Downers Grove South High School graduate who was killed by an alleged drunk driver ... The play was performed at various Downers Grove schools in commemoration of Alcohol Awareness Month.” (*The Downers Grove Reporter*)

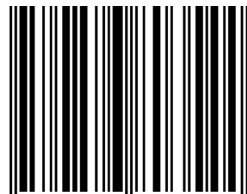
Drama. By Jerome McDonough. *Cast: 6m., 7w., extras. Alky* and its companion, *Juvie*, both one-act plays by Jerome McDonough, are among the most produced plays in the United States. How many thousands of people have been maimed or killed because of a few drinks or due to someone else’s drinking? *Alky* turns the spotlight on alcohol as it affects young adults. Many parents who are horrified at the thought of their children using drugs don’t worry a moment about a beer or two now and then. In fact, some kids get their first drink from Mom and Dad. But statistics show that alcohol is the most dangerous drug of all from the standpoint of ruining lives—and taking lives. In *Alky*, McDonough traces a teenage couple from their first drink to their ... last. *Approximate running time: 30 to 35 minutes. Code: AH3.*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

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Alky

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By

JEROME McDONOUGH

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JEROME MCDONOUGH

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(ALKY)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

Dedication

**In memory of Nikki Scaglione and Tina DeBoskey, members of
the King High School (Tampa, Florida) Thespian Troupe's cast
of DOLLS, who were killed on December 30, 1989,
in an alcohol-related automobile crash.**

**To their parents, to their families, to their fellow performers,
and to their director, Linda Haynes:
God bless you all.**

Members of the Original Cast

**Kaade Roberts, Jeff Tamplen, Anthony Griego, Brian Arellano,
Sara Davis, Brandy Griffith, Kara Lane, Marlene Martinez,
Mason McCarty, Kathi McGreevey, Robbie Pillow,
Myia Poindexter, and Patti Shipman**

ALKY

Cast of Characters (In alphabetical order)

Alex

Billye

Carly

Dana

Erin

Galen

Ira

Joni

Kim

Lydian

Rob

Tay

Wyn

The following parts may be played by members of the ensemble, or they may be cast individually:

Clerk; Dana's Mother; Parents 1 and 2; Drinkers 1, 2, and 3;

Kids 1, 2, and 3; Girls 1, 2, and 3; Buddies 1 and 2;

Store Manager; Resister; Another Resister;

Yet Another Resister; Drink Pusher

Δ

Time: This week-end or last week-end

Place: Somebody's house

Character Profiles

Couples:

ROB—His party, his home. Pressures Dana to drink, even knowing her condition.

DANA—Pregnant. Wants to resist drinking, knows the risk for her baby, but hasn't enough self-confidence or self-control to assert herself.

ALEX—Already seriously alcoholic. Party animal type.

ERIN—His girlfriend. Doesn't want to hurt Alex's feelings by not drinking or by pointing out his problem. Enables, makes excuses, covers for him, drinks with him.

GALEN—Ready-for-anything guy. Home from military. Takes ALL dares, plans to drink everybody under the table. Does "shooters," "chugging." Consumes enormous amount of liquor in a short time.

CARLY—American cultural drinker. Has a family tradition of "happy hour" and party drinking. Tended bar for parents from early childhood.

IRA—Cultural drinker. Beer from the cradle in his home and community. Has a huge capacity. Undetected alcoholic. Musician.

KIM—First time party-er. Never drank before. Immediately feels compelled to drink more. Previously a "dry" or "pre-" alcoholic.

WYN—Links the party and the audience. Average guy, sitting around, as he says, "getting quietly bombed."

LYDIAN—Recovering alcoholic. Pretend-drinks.

JONI. Naive, inexperienced teen-ager.

TAY. Manipulative drunk.

Solo:

BILLYE—Quiet, furtive, except when drunk. Full-blown teen alcoholic. Bartender. Gets extra drinks at the party—always drinks deeply.

The Play

ALKY is not really about alcoholism. It is about the use and abuse of alcohol. How many thousands of people have been maimed or killed because of “a few drinks”—not even their own drinks in a heart-breaking percentage of the cases? How many more will have suffered by the time you read this?

The beer, wine, and hard liquor industries are fond of the term “moderate drinking.” I am not. Alcohol abuse can destroy lives just as the abuse of any drug can destroy them—and only the luckiest victims die.

Do me a favor—stay whole and alive.

Soberly,

Jerome McDonough

PRODUCTION NOTES

By Jerome McDonough

All ensemble members “party” during the entire show. Performers who are “in focus” must consciously “play out” to the audience while all others “play in,” staying active but not taking prominence. This is obviously a delicate balance which will not happen without careful rehearsal.

Here are a few tips for keeping this balance:

There is action at all times, but NO noise or conversation. Keep at least one ear open for cues.

Don't block or mask other actions or let your actions be masked.

Don't do “large” or rapid moves or business during other performers' soliloquies or exchanges, particularly if you are in the immediate area of the focused action.

Drinking progressively slows you down. You become drunker, following the stages of drunkenness mentioned in the script, but NOT cartoon drunk or goofy drunk. Laughs are not what you want.

Performance

The script is printed in standard proscenium arch style, but a full environmental or other intimate theatre approach might prove more poignant. Audience identification with the characters is vital and the increased intimacy is helpful. Proscenium productions should be played as far downstage as possible.

Setting and Props

The setting is a house where a party is going on. There are Down Left and Down Right exits/entrances and Left Center and Right Center onstage exits/entrances. Stage Center is dominated by a bar, probably on an elevated level. The main performance space is Center, Down Center, Down Left Center, and Down Right Center. Smaller, more intimate spaces are far Down Left and Down Right.

The setting itself may be realistic or representational. Props may be real or mimed. Realism is slightly preferred because the play is starkly realistic. However, if full realism, including a keg, wine cooler

bottles and beer cans, steins, “beer bong,” and all the rest of the party baggage cannot be utilized, it is best to pantomime everything. The theatre adage “all or none” applies. Beverages are appropriately colored water or soft drinks. (It would seem a bit inconsistent to turn the performance itself into a drunken brawl. Likewise, first-hand research on partying should be avoided. Most cast members will probably already have the experience, sadly.)

Costuming

Ensemble members choose their own costumes based on their perceptions of their characters. Local party fashion determines the look of ALKY.

Music

The musical orientation of ALKY will change as time passes, since it always happens in the present. Loud music for the opening section, even beginning with the onset of audience seating, establishes the feeling of the show. It may be possible to leave a much-lowered volume level of “musical wallpaper” in place during the performance, but this must be evaluated during rehearsal to decide if it detracts from the play. The original production planned to use the “wallpaper” approach, but acoustics of the space forbade it. By the same token, party-ers should constantly seem to be “hearing” music, whether it is audible to the audience or not. As an example, one aspect of the continuous party action could be dancing. (Dancing proficiency and tempo, as all actions, reflect the stage of drunkenness at the time.)

Deleting, Cutting, Adapting

I was conducting a clinic at a state theatre conference a few years ago and several other playwrights were in attendance. The bulk of the gathering was a mixture of college, high school, and community theatre people. The subject of the cutting of language came up.

Now, my plays have rarely had language problems because of a conscious choice on my part. (Subject matter, yes; language, no.) Some of the playwrights, however, were vehement that none of their words could be cut. This is the artist’s right and a legitimate position, of course; but my question in answer to this view is, “Would you rather have three of your words cut or ALL of your words cut?”

So do I approve of wholesale cutting and deleting within my scripts? Certainly not. But if you can present the great percentage of the play ONLY if certain sections are omitted or if you find yourself in an immutable time frame, please feel free to conscientiously abridge the play to answer these needs. DO NOT, however, cut the ending section, the area where “it all comes down.” I assume that making these points was your original intention, anyway.

Further, no permission is given to “elaborate,” “improvise,” or expand upon the script. If other or additional material is presented at the same performance, it should be outside of the frame of ALKY and program-credited to the author of that material.

I enlist your help, as always, in keeping the script contemporary. Slang and “street” terminology will change, so please reflect those changes in the play. ALKY must never become a “period” piece.

Finally, thanks for being gentle.

Commercial Sponsorship

Groups are encouraged to pursue commercial or corporate sponsorship of a production or a series of productions of ALKY. It would not be appropriate, however, to seek nor to accept such underwriting from the manufacturer, distributor, wholesaler, or retailer of any type of alcoholic beverage.

Awareness Materials

Following are several pages of material which may be used to lay a foundation for an alcohol education program.

The “Awareness Quiz” is used as a pre-test. Each person then self-grades the quiz as answers are presented orally by the test-giver. Correct information is reinforced on each question. (Naturally, should facts change as the years pass, the test and other documents should be adjusted accordingly.)

The “America’s Most Widely Abused Drug” information can be included in program material or presented as a separate booklet. We encourage widespread photocopying and reproduction of the awareness information and the self-test. (But remember, it is illegal to copy the script.)

All programs and awareness materials should include names and numbers of local Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, and Alateen chap-

ters and other support agencies. Everyone attending ALKY needs to receive a program.

Please make the effort to provide this enhanced level of value for your community. Your theatre can be part of the solution for many, many people. Or maybe for just one. Isn't it worth it?

ALKY

["Party MUSIC" comes on very loud. Bright stage LIGHTS rise, revealing the multiple levels of the party. There is a beer keg high on the set, Up Center. There are wash tubs full of iced wine coolers, a large punch bowl or "jungle juice" container, and other liquors strewn about. BILLYE, a drink in hand, is on an elevated platform, functioning as bartender for the gathering. The host, ROB, and his girlfriend, DANA, mingle. The other couples, ALEX and ERIN, GALEN and CARLY, IRA and KIM, TAY and JONI, and WYN and LYDIAN, are involved in drinking, dancing, visiting, and partying as appropriate for their characters. Once the scene is established, the MUSIC fades under. Focus jumps about the area as these statements are made:]

ALEX. I don't have a drinking problem. I drink. I get drunk. I fall down. No problem.

IRA. I don't drink any more. And I SURE don't drink any less!

BILLYE. I won't drink before five o'clock. But it's always five o'clock someplace!

GALEN. You know, you can't buy beer. You can only rent it.
[Belch]

ROB. *[To audience]* Hey, this isn't a pot party or anything. That's my rule—no drugs. But there's enough booze for EVERYBODY. Ten times enough.

ERIN. I never touch hard liquor. Drink, yes; touch, never.

CARLY. Work is the curse of the drinking class.

TAY. *[Singing]* "99 bottles of beer on the wall." *[Speaking]* Now that's my kind of wall!

[WYN drifts out from the party and addresses the audience]

WYN. A few kegs, a bunch of wine coolers, some whiskey, a little everclear. It was about like any other party, about like any other Saturday night. And everybody was there on a mission. Mine was to sit back and get quietly bombed. As always with me, within a couple of hours, mission accomplished. I've picked up some party trivia since that night. Like, did you know there are five stages of drunkenness? The first one's *[gesturing toward the party]* "Happy."

Happy

ALEX. Somebody said that drinking is America's biggest teen-age problem. I'll drink to that.

LYDIAN. You'd drink to Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

ALEX. Good. [*Raising glass*] Here's to Sexually Transmitted Diseases. And transmit 'em in my direction!

BILLYE. Listen to these new drinks I'm working on— [*reading her list:*] "Driving Home Under a Bus," "Mug Full of Scalpels," and "Sweet Sewer Gas." [*General CHEER*]

ERIN. Here's the plan for a perfect week-end. Let's get wasted and go to the dance. Let's get wasted and go to the game. Let's get wasted and then get wasted-er. Is there a word, "wasted-er"?

ROB. If there isn't, there ought to be.

GALEN. [*Moving forward, speaking to the audience*] I'm just back in town for a few days—on leave from the Army. Most of the kids I grew up with are off at college or they're in the service, too, or they're busy with new families of their own. So when Carly called . . .

CARLY. [*Mime phoning*] Galen? Rob's throwing a party Saturday. I was wondering if you'd like to go with me.

GALEN. [*Mime phoning*] Sure. [*To audience*] I know. Jail bait. But great-looking jail bait. So, like I said, I said, [*to Carly again on the phone*] "Sure."

CARLY. And Rob asked if maybe you could pick up the beer for us. We've got the money.

GALEN. No problem.

CARLY. Great.

GALEN. Actually, there was a small problem. Military, yes, twenty-one, no. But I had a fake I.D. I'd used in high school and I hoped it'd still fly. [*Cross to "liquor store" at Down Right*] Bad news when I hit the liquor store. The guy knew me.

CLERK. Galen. How long you been back?

GALEN. Since Monday.

CLERK. See any action?

GALEN. I've just been training so far.

CLERK. Your dad and I served together. Did he ever tell you about that?

GALEN. Yes, sir.

CLERK. Good old hard-drinking days. There was always a few

guys that wouldn't drink with us, but we knew about that type. They'd run when the shooting started, too. But listen to me jabberin'. What can I do for you?

GALEN. I wanted to pick up a keg.

CLERK. I don't recall you being old enough to buy beer, Galen.

GALEN. *[To audience]* Great.

CLERK. But *[looking around, checking]* we have to do our bit for our boys in the service. Will one be enough?

GALEN. I was so relieved, I pitched in for a second one myself.

CLERK. Come back any time. Just make sure I'm alone in the store, okay? *[CLERK rejoins the ensemble]*

GALEN. I'm showing these babies how a real man drinks—and how MUCH a real man drinks. It seems like it takes more and more to get me drunk these days, but I'm up to the challenge. Some of my best military training was in the Beer Gardens and Enlisted Men's Clubs and I'm ready to apply that knowledge under combat conditions. Party, ho!

[WYN addresses the audience]

WYN. Billye collects drink recipes. I have a collection, too. I call it—"Stupid Things That Even Smart People Believe."

KIM. You get drunk or sick from switching drinks.

WYN. You get drunk or sick from DRINKING drinks.

ERIN. Refusing a drink is rude.

WYN. And puking on your friends isn't?

TAY. Black coffee'll sober you up.

WYN. Wake you up. Hype you up. But not sober you up. Time has to do that.

IRA. I'm a social drinker. I never drink alone.

WYN. Great. You and your friends can become alcoholics together.

ERIN. It's impolite to tell a friend he's been drinking too much.

WYN. And when he crashes his car, is it impolite to tell him he's bleeding too much?

TAY. It's just a beer.

WYN. And it has just as much alcohol as a shot of whiskey—or a glass of wine.

CARLY. People are friendlier when they're drunk.

WYN. They probably just seem friendlier. Truth is they're also more hostile. Half of all murders are alcohol-related. Even the friendly murders.

LYDIAN. *[Coming forward, speaking directly to the audience as the party sinks into the background]* I'm Lydian and I'm an alcoholic. *[Pause]* It sounds weird, somebody my age saying that. Everybody has this picture of an alcoholic—there's a bottle in a paper sack and there's a gutter. Some other liquids are around, but let's not get into those. What happened to me was, I started drinking early. And I liked it. So early that by the time I was fourteen even I could see it had gone too far. Then rehab. Now holding sober, thank God. And thanks to meetings twice a week. *[Showing audience her wine cooler bottle]* So what am I doing with this wine cooler? It's my disguise. The first thing at a party, I pick up a cooler and fake a big swig of it. Then I go into the bathroom and pour it out and fill the bottle with water. The rest of the night, I carry it around—for protection. When even one drink is too many, you just don't drink. You can't. *[She rejoins the party]*

WYN. Booze has lots of "pushers." Here are some lines you might try on them if "No, thanks" crashes.

DRINK PUSHER. *[Urging a drink on an Ensemble Member]* They don't make it any better than this, honey.

RESISTER. *[To Pusher]* Sorry. I'm driving.

DRINK PUSHER. *[To another Ensemble Member]* One little drink won't hurt.

ANOTHER RESISTER. I don't like the taste.

DRINK PUSHER. *[Shifts to another person]* Just for me?

YET ANOTHER RESISTER. It always makes me sick.

WYN. If he still doesn't give up, you've run out of the need to be polite. *[One or more of the RESISTERS give the Pusher a solid punch* in the stomach. (*Alternative: Knee him, if you can get away with it)]*

DRINK PUSHER. *[Doubled over in pain]* Why didn't you just TELL me you didn't want a drink?

WYN. The next stage of drunkenness is "Excited."

Excited

[Focus shifts to CARLY and KIM]

CARLY. Isn't this your first party with us?

KIM. My first ever. But don't say anything.

CARLY. You got a buzz yet?

KIM. Oh, yeah.

CARLY. Drink up.

KIM. *[CARLY moves away as KIM comes forward, speaking to the audience]* I can't believe I finally got invited. This is THE group to hang out with. I wasn't too crazy about all the liquor at first, but I was willing to do whatever it took. Anyway, drinking looks pretty good on those TV ads and the shows from Spring Break. My father says girls look cheap drinking beer. I say if it helped me look like those girls on the beach, I wouldn't do anything BUT drink beer. And the taste isn't bad, once you get into it. Excuse me. I think it's time for another one.

ALEX. *[Gaining focus with his announcement]* Hey, guys. I've got a new hobby.

IRA. Sure, drinking!

ALEX. *[To Ira]* No, that's more like my part-time job. *[To all]* My hobby is learning every name in the world for getting drunk—I started with wasted, blitzed, bombed, plastered, and toasted.* *[Update list as terms change]*

BILLYE. Old news.

ALEX. Okay. Everybody knows those. But how about "snockered"?

KIM. Snockered?

ALEX. And sloshed, three sheets in the wind, blasted, stewed, stiff, embalmed, pasted, tore up, wrung out . . . uh . . . juiced, sotted, erased, soggy, sopped, blotto, shot, looped, *[searching his memory]* . . . and pie-eyed.

ROB. Very impressive.

ALEX. *[To all]* If you think of any others, write them down. I'll learn 'em when I'm not—uh—embalmed.

BILLYE. Anybody who still CAN write.

ALEX. If the party works out, we'll all be embalmed before it's over.

[A huge CHEER as the party resumes, full force. Focus shifts to Left where IRA and LYDIAN are in the midst of a discussion]

IRA. Drinking always gets a bad rap. But there's a positive side. The town I come from is proof.

LYDIAN. What? Eighty proof?

IRA. Funny. The first sound I can remember was either a beer bottle opening—or a polka band. Beer was what everybody drank. And nobody ever got really drunk.

LYDIAN. Maybe nobody ever got really sober.

IRA. That is wrong. Look at me. You wouldn't BELIEVE how much it takes to get me drunk. I hold my beer like a barrel. Everybody at home was like that.

LYDIAN. You think that's good?

IRA. Look. For some nationalities it's beer, for some, it's wine. What are you saying, a fourth of the world is wrong?

LYDIAN. Maybe a fourth of the world ought to take a closer look at what's going on.

IRA. Where do you get off? *[Pointing to her "cooler"]* What's that YOU'RE drinking?

LYDIAN. *[Risking the revelation]* It's water.

IRA. Sure it is. *[IRA brushes her off and moves to the proscenium arch, to speak with the audience. LYDIAN returns to the party]* She is so full of it. Drinking's a part of life. You breathe, you eat, you walk, you talk, you drink. Actually, it's part of my life twice. I'm only here because my band didn't have a gig tonight. Unusual for a Saturday. My whole family's got a musical gift. Dad plays in the house band at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. Has for years. I can't imagine music without drinking. It gives you an edge. And you keep playing, and you keep drinking, and you play better and better. Everybody on the band works that way. We made a live tape last week-end. It sounds kind of trashed toward the end—the engineer must have screwed up—but in the first set you can hear a group that's headed for the top. Maybe I'll play for you later—after I catch some more inspiration. *[IRA heads unsteadily for the keg]*

WYN. Families can play a big part in this. Drinkers tend to breed drinkers. Alcohol's in their blood—every way you can think of. But some parents, like these, offer mature guidance: *[Ensemble Members may step out of the crowd to portray PARENTS 1 and 2]*

PARENT 1. We'd rather they'd drink here in our home, where we can keep an eye on them.

PARENT 2. They're not allowed to drink any place else.

WYN. [*Sarcastically*] Good luck.

CARLY. [*Steps forward to speak*] When I was four, the house we lived in had a big basement with a bar in it. My parents and all of their friends spent most week-ends there or in some other basement that was set up the same way. We kids played on the floor during those parties and tried not to get stepped on. During the week, we'd have our own "happy hour" down there. The liquor cabinet was locked, but we pretended. It must have sounded funny, half a dozen pre-schoolers ordering drinks. [*Ensemble Members may become KIDS—4-year-olds playing on the floor*]

KID 1. I'll have a vodka stinger with a twist.

KID 2. Scotch. Straight up.

KID 3. Bourbon, rocks.

KID 4. Double martini. Shaken, not stirred.

CARLY. [*As one of the Kids*] A brewski for me-ski. [*To audience again, as KIDS return to ensemble*] I was a purist, like my dad. He used to give me a sip of his beer to get me to sleep when I was a baby. And to keep me quiet at my brother's Little League games, or to shut me up while we were traveling. Now he grounds me when he catches me drinking. He even puts his beer down long enough to gripe at me about it. Sometimes I think I have a problem with alcohol. I wonder how that happened. [*Pause*] And beer won't do it for me any more. It takes the hard stuff. But I try to quit. And I do. There's not a week goes by I don't quit. Then when I give in and take a drink, I toss it ALL down at once and grab for another one—like I was dying of thirst. And when I start a new bottle, I figure quitting again will be easier if there's no booze around—so I drink it all. [*Pause*] That system doesn't work. [*CARLY returns to the party as WYN speaks*]

WYN. That's not you, though, right? You're only gonna drink a little. Good idea. Here are some other good ideas: Go skinny dipping in a piranha tank—a little. Moon a motorcycle gang—a little. Which reminds me, the third stage of drunkenness is "Confused."