Just Like the Ones I Used to Know

By Terrie Todd

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DEDICATION

To the memory of my father, Matt Oswald. I miss you, Dad.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Ted and Jane are hosting Ted's mother and sister for Christmas. As they share memories of their childhood home *(acted out live)* it becomes clear that their perspectives about how it really was are very different. An on-going "falling off the ladder" gag adds to the laughs. Finally, Mom presents them each with a DVD featuring their old home movies. As they watch together, the realization that perhaps they each had things better than they remember brings a lump to the throat and an appreciation for the value of family.

This comedy is truly versatile in that performing groups can be as creative as desired in videotaping their own "home movies" weeks ahead of their actual stage performance. The play runs about 30 minutes and also works well as a dinner theatre by splitting the scenes throughout the evening.

"He who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him." Proverbs 18:17.

PREMIER PERFORMANCE

First performed at Portage Alliance Church in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, Canada in December, 2006. Original cast featured Nettie Neudorf as Jane, Preston Meier as adult Ted, Barb Knott as Helen, Melanie Ferg as adult Patsy, Evan van Dongen as young Ted, Amy Britton as young Patsy, and Craig Smart as Dad. Stage manager was Liz Driedger. Directed by the author, Terrie Todd.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 3 w, 1 boy, 1 girl)

TED: Adult.

BOY TED: About 10.

JANE: Ted's wife.

HELEN: Ted's mother.

PATSY: Adult, Ted's sister.

GIRL PATSY: About 12.

DAD: Ted's dad.

DIRECTOR'S TIP: *For maximum humor, exaggerate the different perspectives of Ted and Patsy as siblings growing up in the same home. When Ted's memories are being played out, Mom and Dad are mean to him and super sweet to Patsy. When Patsy's memories are being played out, it is the opposite. When Mom's memories are being played out, the kids are both terrors while the parents are sweet and patient. Essentially, this requires boy Ted, girl Patsy, Helen and Dad to portray two different characters each.*

COSTUMES

Modern casual wear for current scene. For the memory scenes, characters need to be in 1970s styles. This gets tricky for Helen, who moves back and forth between scenes. We suggest simple black pants and turtleneck, with an added old-fashioned apron for the memory scenes. A princess dress and tiara for Girl Patsy, farm chore clothes for Boy Ted. Also required: fake leg cast, arm sling, neck brace, and head bandage. The arm sling needs to be easy to take off and on quickly for Helen's scene changes.

Additional costumes for video shoot: Pajamas and bathrobes for Dad, Helen, Children. Biblical costumes – Mary, Joseph, Shepherd, Angel.

SETTING

The stage can be divided in half, with one side decorated with modern-day furnishings and the other like an old farmhouse. There is a parallel placement of furniture including a couch, arm chair, end table, coat rack, decorated Christmas tree, kitchen table with 2 chairs, etc. Using lights to go back and forth, no major scene changes are required.

PLAYWRIGHT'S VIDEO NOTES

For the video shoot, we spent a day at a farm, weeks earlier, where we could shoot in the barn with live animals. Some scenes were also shot inside the farmhouse, and we used the same paint color from the house on the "farmhouse" side of our stage set. It's also important to incorporate the same clothing and props on stage as used in the video. We used the same striped tablecloth on the kitchen table in our on-stage scene as in the video, as well as for a head-covering for Patsy when she played Mary in the video. Because the video represents a compilation of old home movies, the quality does not have to be professional. It is further simplified by the fact it can be shot without sound, and music added in during the editing process. We used "Let There Be Peace on Earth," which spoke to the ongoing sibling rivalry and created a memorable, heart-warming effect. We also had the owners string all-blue Christmas lights on the front of the farmhouse for the video shoot so that we could get a still shot of the house lit up at night to close the play. Be sure to shoot your video as soon as possible after the play is cast to allow plenty of time for editing.

See a complete list of props at the end of the script.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Morning, December 24th, current day. JANE is in the living room wrapping gifts and singing/humming "White Christmas." TED walks in, a tangled bundle of Christmas icicle lights in his arms. He's thoroughly disgusted.)

TED: That's it!! I've had it with these stupid lights. We've got strings here we just bought last year and they don't work. *(HE throws them on the floor.)*
JANE: *(Annoyed.)* Ted! *(SHE starts picking them up, trying to untangle them.)*
TED: From now on we either leave the lights up all year round —
JANE: That's just tacky!
TED: Or we throw 'em out every year and get new ones.
JANE: Now that's just a waste.
TED: OR we don't have any at all. I vote for that.
JANE: Not an option.
TED: Like anybody would miss them anyway.
JANE: Honey, don't be such a grinch.
TED: Besides, it's freezing out there.
JANE: Well, who leaves it for December 24th? If you'd hung them that gorgeous day right after Halloween like I asked—
TED: And miss my one last shot on the course? No way.
JANE: Here, hold this. *(SHE hands HIM one end of the light string and continues untangling as she talks, backing up and stretching the string straight.)* I don't know why you're being so stubborn about this. Didn't you have Christmas lights on your house when you were a kid?
TED: Oh yes, we had lights on our house.
JANE: Wouldn't you have missed them if you didn't?
TED: I guess. But I hated the job then and I hate it now. Dad was afraid of heights and always roped me into climbing the ladder.
JANE: Such a slave driver.
TED: He was!

JANE: Made a man outta ya, didn't he?
TED: I remember one year he made me take out the multi-colored bulbs and replace them with all blue. Mom thought our old farmhouse was the most fashionable one for miles around that year.
JANE: Speaking of your mother, you do realize she is going to be here any minute. WITH your sister.
TED: They'll tell you.
JANE: Tell me what?
TED: How hard I had to work when I was kid.

(SFX: Chimes. LIGHTS fade on TED and LIGHTS up on Ted's childhood home in the 1970s. Homemade afghans abound. His mother, HELEN, is filling the cookie jar with freshly baked Christmas cookies and singing/humming "White Christmas." GIRL PATSY is sitting at the table stuffing herself with cookies, dressed like a princess. BOY TED enters in his farm chore clothes.)

BOY TED: Hi, Mommy. Those sure smell good.

(HE reaches for one, HELEN slaps his hand.)

HELEN: Did you get your chores done, Theodore?
BOY TED: Yes, ma'am.
HELEN: Fed the sheep?
BOY TED: Yes, ma'am.
HELEN: Gathered the eggs?
BOY TED: Yes, ma'am.
HELEN: Fed the chickens?
BOY TED: Yes, ma'am.
HELEN: Shoveled the snow?
BOY TED: Yes, ma'am.
HELEN: Watered that stubborn ol' donkey?
BOY TED: Yes, ma'am.
HELEN: Took out the garbage?
BOY TED: Yes, ma'am.
HELEN: Cleaned the outhouse?

End of Freeview

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