

Khrushchev and Me

by Burton Bumgarner

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The year is 1960 and the fear of nuclear war is foremost in the minds of Americans. Fallout shelters dot the landscape, civil defense alerts are heard, and the menacing face of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev invades the homes nightly through the miracle of television. This is President Eisenhower's last year in office and the Soviets are about to put an American pilot named Gary Powers on trial for espionage. This is the year that the O'Brien family leaves New York City for a better life in the Jersey suburbs. Children Angie and Ted are worried about fitting in at their new school. Amy, the youngest child, is worried about the world situation. Unfortunately, the O'Briens move across the street from the Meyersons, who prove to be the worst neighbors in the world. Amy imagines that Khrushchev, who seems to be the cause of so much tension and fear, would probably be a nicer person if she could visit with him and he could taste her mother's home cooking. Her new friends think she's crazy, especially when she adopts Mr. Khrushchev as her pen pal. She invites the Soviet leader to her home, but she understands that he's very busy running the Soviet Union. Still, she wishes she could meet him. Then, on Christmas Eve, she gets her wish.

Running Time:

70 minutes

Dedicated to Sergei Khrushchev

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(8 m, 6 w, 2 flexible, extras)

AMY O'BRIEN: 12-14 years old.
ANGIE O'BRIEN: Amy's sister, 17-18 years old.
TED O'BRIEN: Amy's brother, 15-16 years old.
LOUISE O'BRIEN (MOM): The mother.
JOHN O'BRIEN (DAD): The father.
BENNY MEYERSON: The neighbor, rather tacky.
BABS MEYERSON: Benny's wife.
BEAU MEYERSON: Their son, 17-18 years old.
LISA MEYERSON: Their daughter, 15-16 years old.
ANNA: A friend of Amy's, same age.
WAYNE: Anna's twin brother.
GEORGE: Wayne's best friend.
AGENT JONES: Secret Service Agent.
AGENT SMITH: Another Secret Service Agent.
BORIS: A Russian body guard.
NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV: Premier of the Soviet Union.
ANNOUNCER
CAROLERS

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

Prologue: July 3, 1960
Scene 1: July 4, 1960
Scene 2: Labor Day, 1960

ACT II

Scene 1: Thanksgiving Day, 1960
Scene 2: Christmas Eve, 1960

Production Notes are at the end of the script.

A Note From the Playwright

In the summer of 1999, I was searching for a subject for a play for a multi-generational cast. I worked with several ideas, but finally settled on setting the play in the early 1960s. In reading through the news magazines of the time I was amazed at how much of a world presence the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was. I settled on the year 1960 since that was a time of much transition and turmoil in America with the capture of American pilot Gary Powers, the election of President Kennedy, and the menacing presence of communism. Quite by accident I located an address for Sergei Khrushchev, the son of the former Soviet leader and a professor of international studies at a major American university. Sergei was a young adult when his father was Soviet Premier, and he traveled extensively with his father's entourage. Like Amy O'Brien in the play, I wrote Khrushchev's son a letter. In the letter I described the play I was writing: A comedy to help children and teenagers of the present understand the fear of the Cold War. Within a month I had received both a letter and phone call from Dr. Khrushchev, and learned much about his father's character and personality. It was interesting to hear the former Soviet leader described with warmth and affection. The purpose of this play is neither to glorify Khrushchev, nor to make him the object of ridicule. He was a major world leader who did what he thought was best for his people. In spite of shortcomings, he sought peaceful coexistence with the West, and he tried to undo a lot of the horrors of the Stalin regime. *Khrushchev and Me* seeks to relay some of the spirit of that particular time with tenderness and humor.

This play, originally entitled, "Christmas with Khrushchev," was first performed at the Fine Arts Department of the First Presbyterian Church in Kingsport, Tennessee.

ACT I

Prologue: July 3, 1960

(AT RISE: GEORGE and WAYNE are DSR, lying on their stomachs, propped up on elbows, looking at the audience. George has binoculars. Wayne has a bandage around his head. Anna is DSL, sitting on the edge of the stage, talking on the phone. All are dressed for summer. The CURTAIN is closed.)

ANNA: It's really nice around here today. My ugly brother and his stupid friend are outside pretending to be secret agents.

GEORGE: It looks like we got new neighbors. The house on the corner.

ANNA: Wayne's been expelled from the swimming pool for the rest of the summer.

WAYNE: Our hideout? *(Disappointed, takes the binoculars from GEORGE; can't focus them.)* No fair! I loved that house!

GEORGE: There are ten more new houses down the block we can use as hideouts.

ANNA: My stupid brother pretended to be drowning so the life-guard would rescue him ... yeah, Linda. That really pretty girl with the red swimsuit.

WAYNE: But that house has character.

GEORGE: *(Taking binoculars.)* All the houses in this neighborhood are the same.

WAYNE: That one has a tree in the yard.

ANNA: Anyway, Linda pulled Wayne out of the pool, and he held his breath and turned red, so she thought he needed mouth-to-mouth re-suffocation.

GEORGE: *(Looking through binoculars.)* There's a man carrying a lamp. Oops! He dropped the lamp. There's a woman yelling at the man.

ANNA: All the kids from the neighborhood were standing around, thinking my stupid brother was dead. All of a sudden he opened his eyes, saw Linda's face about half an inch from his, and he screamed and hit his head on the concrete. Now he has twelve stitches.

GEORGE: There goes the television. Motorola! Nice set!

ANNA: He can't go to the pool for the rest of the summer.

WAYNE: Any kids?

GEORGE: Let's see. There's a girl.

WAYNE: How old is she?

GEORGE: Looks like she's in high school. She's probably about ... twenty-five or thirty.

WAYNE: I'm through with older women.

GEORGE: *(Slyly.)* Like you ever got started!

WAYNE: Hey! That lifeguard was seconds away from giving me mouth-to-mouth resportation! *(Pronounced as spelled.)*

GEORGE: And you panicked. What a loser!

ANNA: Mom said he should be too embarrassed to leave the house. But he has no shame.

GEORGE: There's a boy.

WAYNE: Our age?

GEORGE: Looks like he's in high school, too.

ANNA: I hear we have more new neighbors. The house on the corner. The one with the tree.

GEORGE: There's another kid. Looks our age. It's ... it's ... a girl. *(WAYNE takes binoculars.)*

ANNA: Mom says they have three kids. There's a girl our age. I hope she's nice.

WAYNE: I hope she's pretty. *(Fumbles with binoculars, looks through wrong end.)* How do you focus these stupid things? *(Hands GEORGE binoculars.)*

ANNA: I'm sure my ugly brother and his stupid friend will want to check her out.

WAYNE: We'd better check these people out.

ANNA: But they won't have a clue how.

WAYNE: *(BOTH stand and face each other and salute.)* Soldier! Go down there and ring the doorbell and report back to headquarters.

End of Freeview

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