

The Sidelines

By Burton Bumgarner

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Small-town life isn't for everyone, especially if you are used to the big city, and for Dr. Jennings' family this is no exception. He's always dreamed of life as a country doctor, but life in a town without an espresso machine horrifies his wife and two teenagers.

These tensions peak when the family attends the local Fourth of July parade, a staple of small-town life. Viewing the "parade" from curbside as it passes, the family enumerates the many sins and failings of the unsophisticated townsfolk, some of which seem deserved. But the natives aren't too pleased with the way the "foreigners" from the big city are treating them either.

In the end, the Jennings' find comfort in the hospitality a small town offers and the local residents find some of the big city ideas intriguing.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m, 7 w)

ELOISE KENNEDY: A retired high school teacher, 60s.

HELEN: Her daughter, late 30s.

JESSICA: Helen's daughter, teenager.

ELBERT TRANBARGER: Works in rendering plant, late 30s.

TOOTIE: Elbert's wife.

RHONDA: Elbert's daughter, teenager.

JUNIOR: Elbert's son, teenager.

JOHN JENNINGS: A physician, new to town, early 40s.

SUSAN: John's wife.

MEGAN: John's daughter, teenager.

JOSH: John's son, teenager.

DWANE: Sells soft drinks at the parade.

SETTING

The Sidelines takes place at a Fourth of July parade in a small town. A bare stage is used. Actors bring lawn chairs, coolers, American flags, etc., and face the audience as if watching a parade. Extras may cross behind, buy drinks from Dwane, watch the parade, etc. They must not, however, distract the action. Cross-fading may be used between the three locations. Eloise, Helen and Jessica enter SR and cross SL. Elbert and his family are SC, and John's family is SR. The implication is there is some distance between the three groups. As the last "float" passes, members of the audience should throw candy at the stage. The time is the present.

PROPS

ELOISE: Umbrella, small American flag.

HELEN: Two folding lawn chairs, watch.

JESSICA: Folding lawn chair, small cooler, two dollar bills.

ELBERT: Lounge chair, small American flag, large cigar, funny hat, sunglasses, cooler.

TOOTIE: Folding lawn chair, small American flag, funny hat, sunglasses.

RHONDA: Folding lawn chair, small American flag, funny hat, sunglasses, chewing gum.

JUNIOR: Small American flag, funny hat, sunglasses, dollar bill.

DWANE: Wheelbarrow of ice and sodas, large number of dollar bills.

JOHN, SUSAN, MEGAN, JOSH: Folding lawn chairs.

THE SIDELINES

(During BLACKOUT patriotic music is heard. AT RISE: LIGHTS up SR. ELOISE, HELEN and JESSICA enter. Eloise holds an opened umbrella above her head to block out the sun. Helen carries two folding chairs, and Jessica carries a folding chair and a small cooler. They stop several times as they talk. Eventually they cross to SL and unfold their chairs.)

ELOISE: I just love the Fourth of July parade.

HELEN: Mother, it's awfully hot.

ELOISE: It wouldn't be the Fourth of July if the temperature wasn't in the 90s.

JESSICA: This is boring. I can't believe we're going to sit out here on Main Street and watch this stupid parade go by.

ELOISE: It's tradition.

JESSICA: Can't we break tradition?

ELOISE: Of course we can. But we're not going to break this one. We've had Fourth of July parades in this town ever since I can remember.

JESSICA: There's not much of anything else in this town.

HELEN: Now, Jessica. Don't go putting down your hometown!

ELOISE: Jessica's just a typical teenage girl. I think she's embarrassed to be seen in public with her mother and her grandmother.

HELEN: Oh, I'm sure that doesn't bother Jessica.

JESSICA: Yes, it does.

ELOISE: *(Arriving SL.)* This looks like a good place.

JESSICA: *(Looking at audience.)* All the nasty people in town are across the street.

HELEN: So?

JESSICA: So...they can look at us.

ELOISE: It won't hurt them to see nice-looking people.

JESSICA: But I don't want them looking at me.

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ELOISE: (*Looking at audience.*) I taught most of those people. There's Ronnie and Buster and Frankie Jo and Brenda.

JESSICA: You know their names?

ELOISE: Of course. I remember all my students. There's Jimmy Lee. I see he's out on parole...again. (*Yells.*) Hello, Jimmy Lee! You'd better learn how to behave, or you won't be spending many more Fourth of Julys out in the fresh air! (*JESSICA is mortified.*) That boy never could learn to conjugate verbs.

(*ELBERT, TOOTIE, RHONDA and JUNIOR enter SL. They carry lawn chairs, American flags, and a large cooler, and they wear funny hats and sunglasses.*)

HELEN: Just sit down, Jessie. (*Looking at watch.*) The parade should begin any minute now.

JESSICA: (*Points to audience.*) I don't like them looking at me.

ELOISE: As long as they're over there, and we're over here, we'll be safe.

ELBERT: (*To TOOTIE.*) Lookie there! It's Miz Kennedy. (*Crossing to ELOISE, HE speaks in a booming voice startling her.*) Hey, there, Miz Kennedy! (*All THREE WOMEN jump.*)

ELOISE: Oh...hello.

ELBERT: Remember me?

ELOISE: Oh..why...yes, of course I remember you. (*Can't remember who HE is.*) Uh...let's see...

ELBERT: Ain't this a nice day for a parade?

ELOISE: Oh, yes. It's a delightful day for a parade.

JESSICA: Except for the people.

ELBERT: You don't remember me, do you?

JESSICA: And the heat.

ELBERT: (*To TOOTIE.*) I don't think she remembers me.

JESSICA: And the floats. And the marching bands. And the cheerleaders.

TOOTIE: How could she forget? You made the loudest armpit noises in the history of the school.

End of Freeview

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