

# In Our Own Backyard

*By Rachel Lopez*

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## **DEDICATION**

*To my dad. I am listening. Love, your frog*

## **STORY OF THE PLAY**

When Chris, a popular, straight-A student, suffers the loss of his younger sister in a hit-and-run accident, he is left to struggle through the remainder of his high school career. But Jake Simmons, the star quarterback and class bully, won't leave him alone and begins to torment Chris about his personal tragedy while taking bullying to a whole new level. Haunted by his sister and reeling in his pain, Chris decides to take matters into his own hands. *In Our Own Backyard* tells a story of profound loss, personal tragedy, teen angst and violence amongst a group of teenagers navigating their way through a very challenging time -- one week prior to a school shooting and one year later.

## **AWARDS**

"Honorable Mention" in the 2016 Beverly Hills Theatre Guild's Marilyn Hall Award for Youth Theatre.

## **PREMIERE PERFORMANCE**

March 12, 2015 at Good Luck Macbeth Theatre in Reno, Nevada. The cast was as follows:

Ben Stevenson – Chris  
Sydni Bringhurst – Alison  
Tyler-Ann Ellison – Stephanie  
Logan Strand – Jake  
Noah Christiansen - Josh  
Ashley Hutchinson – Heather  
Ana McKay – Kayla  
Kati Stensrud – Taylor  
Tucker Rash – Randy  
Camile Franke – Brooke  
Eleanor Yarborough – Cassie  
Christine Saunders – Miss Esqueda  
Lenora Graham – Principal Anderson  
Gabe Graham – Reporter

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(Cast of 14: 4 m, 8 w, 2 flexible)*

**CHRIS:** A hard-working, popular honors student, 17.

**ALISON:** Chris's best friend, 17.

**JAKE:** The star quarterback and relentless bully, 17.

**JOSH:** Jake's sidekick, 17.

**STEPHANIE:** An honors student; socially awkward, 16.

**HEATHER:** The quintessential "mean girl," 17, although she becomes much more than that. There is a steep contrast between Heather before the incident and after. Portraying the character with depth and purpose is imperative in making her more than just one-dimensional.

**KAYLA:** Heather's friend, 17.

**TAYLOR:** Heather's other friend, 17. Kayla and Taylor say things in unison in most of their scenes together.

**RANDY:** A loner, 16.

**BROOKE:** Randy's younger sister, 14.

**CASSIE:** Chris's younger sister, 14. Deceased. She is dressed in a bright yellow leotard, tights and tutu.

**MISS ESQUEDA:** An eager young teacher, 24.

**PRINCIPAL ANDERSON:** Never seen onstage, only on video, 40's. This role can be either female or male.

**REPORTER:** This character can just be a voice on the video. This role can be either female or male.

### **SETTING**

Time: Present day.

Locations: High school hallway, therapist's office, Chris's bedroom, Randy's living room, outside on school grounds, jail cell.

## TECHNICAL NOTES

**Set:** The set should never resemble an actual school. It is intended to have the audience imagine their own version of a school. Various locations are established by simple set pieces -- a bench, a cot that is covered to look like a bed in the bedroom scenes and uncovered for the jail scene. A TV is on an ATV cart DSR. In the original production, we had two chain-link type fences about 8 feet in height and 10 feet in width that served as the backdrop. As the actors entered they would hang a picture on the fence. Then during crosses throughout the play, they would continue to hang more. These pictures were drawn by young children who were told to draw an image of something they feared or a nightmare they could recall. By the end of the play both fences were covered in disturbing images. This created a powerful final picture.

**Scenes:** The scene changes should be seamless. The play moves continuously with minimal set pieces to suggest different places. The only blackouts are after Scene 13 (the v/o of Miss Esqueda leaving a message for Principal) in case there is a need for an intermission, and after Scene 21 (the gunshot heard on an empty stage) for dramatic effect.

**About the video clips:** The actors playing the teacher and principal will have to agree to being videotaped for the video portions in the play. The reporter is always off camera so you only need an actor to vocally play the part. The interview should have a local news feel to it; not too polished. The principal is ONLY in the video clips. She or he should never make an appearance on stage. The video portion is optional; however, it may prove difficult to perform those scenes live and keep the secret of Miss Esqueda being the victim. I intentionally incorporated the video aspect so the audience can't tell that she is in a wheelchair during those interviews. This makes the ending that much more dramatic and surprising.

\* *See additional technical notes at the end of the script.*

### **Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: CHRIS asleep on a cot is DSL. A TV on ATV cart is DSR throughout the entire play. In BLACKOUT we hear the SOUND of various media reports on school shootings overlapping and slowly rising to a louder volume until suddenly - a sound of a gunshot. SPOTLIGHT hits Chris as he bolts up in bed, breathing hard. He tries calming down, taking deep breaths; after a few moments SPOTLIGHT fades on him sobbing while sitting on the edge of bed. MUSIC begins; LIGHTS up on stage. STUDENTS enter walking quickly as if in the hallways of school. Cliques and social groups are revealed during this montage that lasts approx. 1:30. As students begin to exit, the MUSIC fades down and SFX rise: school bell sounds as Chris stands CS alone. He exits as TV comes on.)*

**REPORTER:** Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us, Miss Esqueda. We are honored to be interviewing a local hero.

**MISS ESQUEDA:** Please, I don't consider myself a hero. Anybody in my situation would have done the same thing.

**REPORTER:** Is it true you were only a couple of months into your very first year of teaching when the shooting occurred?

**MISS ESQUEDA:** Yes, that is true. I had been there eleven weeks and four days.

**REPORTER:** How do you cope with something like that so early in your career?

**MISS ESQUEDA:** I suppose the same way I would at any point in my career, as best as I can. Listen, you never think something like this will happen. So when it does it just rips you to the core. It shakes your reality. But it hasn't changed my passion for my job. I love what I do and I plan on doing it for a very long time.

*(TV OFF.)*

**End of Scene**

## Scene 2

*(AT RISE: The school hallway. SFX: Bell rings. STUDENTS enter walking rapidly through the halls. ALISON is on floor DSC decorating a banner for homecoming. CHRIS enters.)*

**PRINCIPAL:** *(Over intercom.)* Attention, all students! Upper and middle school will have a combined lunch today due to testing. Therefore, lunchtime will be extended by 10 minutes. But only 10 minutes. There will be no excuses for tardiness to your 5<sup>th</sup> period class. Thank you.

**ALISON:** *(To CHRIS.)* Hey! You never called me back last night.

**CHRIS:** Yeah, sorry. I was buried in homework and I had to study for three different tests.

**ALISON:** Chris, you've got to take a break once in a while. You know what they say, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

**CHRIS:** Who's Jack?

**ALISON:** It's a proverb. *(Waits for reaction, gets nothing.)* Never mind.

**CHRIS:** Nice banner.

**ALISON:** Thanks. Why don't you get down here and help me? You are chairman of the homecoming committee; you should be the one wasting your lunchtime decorating this crap for the homecoming dance.

**CHRIS:** Okay, okay. Don't get hostile. Hand me a marker.

**ALISON:** By the way, are we still going to homecoming together?

**CHRIS:** Oh god, Alison, I don't know. Not sure I'm going to be up for it.

**ALISON:** It's still a few days away. Think about it.

**CHRIS:** We'll see. But if I can't go you should still go.

**ALISON:** I will, but it will be more fun if you're with us.

**CHRIS:** Us? Who else is going?

**ALISON:** Stephanie, of course, and maybe a couple of other people.

**CHRIS:** See, you're covered. You don't need me.

## **End of Freeview**

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