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Family Plays



*One to
Grow On*

*By
Brian Kral*

One to Grow On

**First produced by the Rainbow Company
Children's Theatre in Las Vegas.**

Drama. By Brian Kral. Cast: 2m., 1w., 4 to 5 boys. Created by one of America's foremost authors of serious plays for young audiences, this play is a touching portrait of a young man's 12th birthday, spent in the company of his widowed grandfather. Through the course of several disagreements and a long delayed meeting with his estranged father, a young man and his grandfather come to a deeper realization of what it means to have a family. *One to Grow On* is a powerful biographical play exploring the similarities between two characters "as different as any two people should be and still be related." *Multiple suggested sets. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: O80.*

Family Plays

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By

BRIAN KRAL

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“Nature never sends a great man into the planet, without confiding the secret to another soul.”

**Ralph Waldo Emerson,
“Representative Men”**

One to Grow On was first produced May 16, 1980, by the Rainbow Company Children's Theatre in Las Vegas, with the following cast:

Timothy Kurtz, at 16.....Joe Kucan
Timmy Kurtz, at 12.....Kirk J. Stowers
Grandfather.....Charles McCrea
First Young Man.....Scott Davidson
Second Young Man.....Ron E. Leach
Third Young Man.....Danny Marre
Margaret Hartley.....Loy McCrea
Karl Kurtz.....David R. Sankuer

Directed by Jody Johnston
Scenery by David Sankuer
Costumes by Karen McKenney
Lighting by Michael Dorough

All technical crews (light board operators, sound technicians, property crews, etc.) were made up of members of the Rainbow Company Children's Ensemble. (The Rainbow Company is a theatre training program for young people, and is a program of the City of Las Vegas.)

**This play has appeared previously, in slightly different form,
in *Dramatics Magazine* and in *West Coast Plays*.**

Time: the not-distant past, as seen from the present

Place: a small college town in Minnesota

Characters:

Timothy Kurtz

Timmy Kurtz

Grandfather

First Young Man

Second Young Man

Third Young Man

Margaret Hartley

Karl Kurtz

The play is divided into numbered scenes, but the action should be continuous, without the interruption of blackouts except where noted in the script.

Scene One

(TIMMY KURTZ, a young man just this side of twelve years old, and wearing light blue jeans and a pajama top, enters stealthily. He carries an old BB gun and is concentrating on an unseen object in the middle of the stage. TIMOTHY—Timmy at an older age—enters from the opposite side, watching the younger version of himself.)

TIMOTHY: *(to Timmy)* Shhh. Don't make a sound.

(The younger man lowers himself slowly to the ground.)

Quiet, now. Or you'll scare it away.

(Lying on his stomach, Timmy aims along the barrel at the object. Long pause. Finally Timmy lays the gun flat, lowering his face to the ground.)

I couldn't do it. *(Timothy steps forward, talking directly to the audience.)* I lay there for over fifteen minutes in the cold, wet grass, with the rusty old BB gun I'd found in the garage pressed against and bruising my shoulder, and still I couldn't do it. I just didn't have it in me.

(The younger Timmy gets to his feet and kicks a can in the direction of the object.)

TIMMY: Go on. Shoo! You've got better things to do.

(The younger Timmy pulls a paperback book from his backpocket, and sits down on the stage to read.)

TIMOTHY: *(to the audience)* That's the kind of summer it was—full of the promise of hunting and fishing, and long hikes through the woods. It was the kind of summer you find in an Ernest Hemingway book. And it was the kind of summer my grandfather would've liked as a kid, instead of having to work, which he did most of his life.

(Timothy steps forward, to sit on the edge of a low fence. Behind him, TIM CHRISTENSEN—Timmy's grandfather—can be seen inside the kitchen of his home.)

TIMOTHY: Grandpa would have liked Ernest Hemingway. They were cut from the same cloth. They could have spent hours together, oiling their rifles and their boots, and then tracking a fox or deer through the forest. That's what my grandfather had in mind every summer I came to visit.

(Slight pause, interrupted by the call of a wild bird.)

I don't think many people read Hemingway today. They figure he's outdated. But I've read him. *(With an honest, deferential nod.)* He was Ok.

(He stands up from the fence, just as the younger Timmy rises to go into the house.)

But I couldn't have lived that kind of life any more than I could have lived my grandfather's life or he could have lived mine. Each person's different, that much I know. My grandfather and I were as different as any two people should be and still be related. And we'd have never succeeded living each other's lives. *(He smiles.)* It was all we could do just to try and understand them.

Scene Two

(The kitchen is represented by a small kitchen table and chairs, and a counter and sink. Skeletal walls meet to form one corner of the kitchen; other than that, it is suggested through props. Timmy enters the kitchen, and sits at the table. His grandfather stands at the counter dishing out two bowls of oatmeal. He has on his work-trousers and a t-shirt, and is wearing a pair of slippers.)

GRANDFATHER: So! Did you get us a rabbit for dinner?

TIMMY: No.

GRANDFATHER: Good thing I packed a couple sandwiches, then.

TIMMY: How'd you know it was a rabbit?

GRANDFATHER: There hasn't been a deer in that front yard in over fifteen years- -not since they put the highway through. So that left it either a rabbit or a small dog.

TIMMY: It could've been a squirrel.

GRANDFATHER: No relations of mine ever shot squirrels for dinner.
(He sets the bowls of oatmeal down on the table, and takes his seat.)

TIMMY: Why would I want to shoot a dog?

GRANDFATHER: I don't know. I thought all you Indians ate puppies for breakfast.

TIMMY: Is that true? Where'd you hear that?

GRANDFATHER: Don't ask me! Aren't you the local authority on Indians?

TIMMY: Just 'cause I'm part Indian doesn't mean I know what all of them do. There are different tribes. I can't answer for everybody.

GRANDFATHER: That's true. But maybe you should look into it, all the same.

TIMMY: They've got a great book on Indians down at the Ben Franklin.

GRANDFATHER: I told you before, don't go dragging any more books in the house. It's bad enough you brought a suitcase full of 'em from home.

TIMMY: Oh, Grandpa...

GRANDFATHER: Never see you go anywhere as it is without a book in your back pocket!

TIMOTHY: Mom likes me to read.

GRANDFATHER: Your mom ain't here, though, is she?

(A definitive answer.)

And all that reading'll ruin your eyes.

TIMOTHY: Reading is one of the best ways there is—

GRANDFATHER: You're not going to learn anything reading books! The only way to learn is to get out and do. Now eat your breakfast before it gets cold.

(They eat in silence for the moment.)

You want some toast?

TIMMY: *(his head down)* No, thank you.

GRANDFATHER: How about some orange juice?

TIMMY: *(absent-mindedly eating)* I'm fine.

(Pause. His grandfather slowly leans over the table to get a closer look, then falls back in his seat.)

GRANDFATHER: Ho-ho! You little devil.

TIMMY: *(raising his head)* What? What'd I do?

GRANDFATHER: *(laughing)* You almost had me believing it.

TIMMY: What?

GRANDFATHER: I was sitting here, thinking I'd hurt your feelings.

TIMMY: Why'd you think that?

GRANDFATHER: Because your face hung so low, it was sweeping the floor with your hair, that's why. Come to find out you've just got your nose stuck in a book again. *(He picks up the open book from Timmy's lap and puts it on the counter.)* From now on we'll have both feet on the floor and both hands on the table. There'll be no more reading during breakfast.

(Timmy props his chin in his hand.)

Don't think you'll change my mind, either. I spent all last week staring at Jacob's Two-Two, and I don't plan to do it again. It got to the point I didn't know if you was still sitting there. Thought maybe you'd propped the book up on the table and snuck off somewhere. *(Grandfather resumes eating.)*

TIMMY: You left out "the Hooded Fang."

GRANDFATHER: I what?

TIMMY: The name of the book was Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang. You left out the- -

GRANDFATHER: What kind of a book could it be with a name like that anyway?

TIMMY: I was reading it over. I liked it when I was younger.

GRANDFATHER: Well, it won't make much difference then. If you read them all twice, I guess you can lay off one summer without losing anything. Now, let's change the subject.

TIMMY: *(dejectedly)* To what?

GRANDFATHER: *(picking up the b-b gun)* Where'd you find this blunderbus?

TIMMY: It's a b-b gun.

GRANDFATHER: I know it's a b-b gun- -I bought it for your mother when she was eight years old. *(He turns it over in his hands, studying it.)* Can't remember the last time I saw it. It's spotted with rust.

TIMMY: It was in the garage.

GRANDFATHER: Needs oiling. They don't make them like this anymore. Hmph. *(He leans the b-b gun against the edge of the table, and seems saddened by its condition. Pause.)*

TIMMY: Your oatmeal's getting cold. *(Timmy gets up from the table.)* You want some more?

GRANDFATHER: *(subdued)* No. You finish it.

(Timmy goes to the counter, and scoops out the last of the oatmeal. He turns to start back with his bowl but stops, smiling with an idea. He picks up the empty pan, then very loudly scrapes and clanks the spoon in the pan, until:.)

What the heck is all that racket? You're going to wear that pot clean out with....

(Timmy begins to laugh.)

What's so funny?

TIMMY: Mom says you used to drive her crazy in the mornings by always eating your oatmeal out of the pan. She says you'd clang-clang-clang, all morning long, until every dog in the neighborhood was barking, and people were calling up to complain.

GRANDFATHER: *(laughing to himself, he begins to eat his oatmeal)*
She said that, huh?

TIMMY: *(still laughing)* She sure did.

GRANDFATHER: *(shaking his head)* Your mother had a few bad habits herself, as I recall.

TIMMY: Like what?

GRANDFATHER: Never you mind. If she'd wanted you to know, I'm sure she'd have told you....She say anything else about me?

TIMMY: Not much. Except that, when she was a girl, you wouldn't tell anyone she was part Indian. Like it was a secret or something.

GRANDFATHER: I reckon maybe it was.

TIMMY: Why?

GRANDFATHER: *(eating his oatmeal)* Reasons you wouldn't understand.

TIMMY: Mom say it was because you were embarrassed.

GRANDFATHER: Well, your mother doesn't always remember things the way they were.

TIMMY: She remembers when you knocked Grandma over the back of the couch. *(As soon as he's said it, he realizes he shouldn't have. Grandfather sets down his spoon deliberately.)*

GRANDFATHER: Did she tell you that?....Well?

TIMMY: Yes, sir.

GRANDFATHER: *(shaking his head)* The heck! What kind of thing is that to... *(He stands up from the table.)* We all do things we regret later. Your mother would have a tough time denying that. Oh, well, I got to get ready or I'll be late for work. *(He starts out, towards the bedroom.)* You know, she tends to forget a few things. I'll bet she never mentioned how hard I worked for her.

TIMMY: She says you went to work when you were ten years old.

GRANDFATHER: I'm glad she remembers that much, anyway. *(He exits the kitchen, to get ready.)*

TIMOTHY: My mother remembered quite a few things, actually.

(The older Timothy addresses the audience, but is free to move within the visible area of the past scene, where Timmy has remained, finishing his breakfast. In many respects, Timothy- -like us- -is an observer of the actions taking place.)

For example, how Grandpa took her out shooting almost as soon as she was old enough to walk. *(He smiles.)* Well, maybe a little older. But not much, to hear her tell it. And how they were the talk of the town at one point, having won every shootin' match in the county three years in a row. She even has some of her old medals. Not that she's proud of them, we just came across them when we were looking in an old shoe-box. She wanted to throw them out, but I wouldn't let her. There was also a very funny picture of the two of them all dressed up in baggy hunting clothes, like they were going on a safari in the jungle or something. She looked so silly, it made her blush. I kept that, too. *(He hesitates, moving restlessly.)* My own memories were quite a bit different. For one

thing, I can't remember much about my grandfather before Grandma died. I'd spent the summer with them several times when I was younger, but, up until then, Grandpa didn't stick out in my mind. It was kind of like he was a stranger, living in Grandma's house: he'd sit with us for meals, glance at the morning paper, but never really say much. It's funny, thinking back, but the summer I turned twelve was a big change for both of us. My grandmother had died; mom had remarried and was on her honeymoon; and all of a sudden, Grandpa and I were just kind of stuck with each other.

GRANDFATHER: *(reentering, buttoning his work-shirt.)* Speaking of memories, you must think mine is slipping.

TIMMY: *(putting his bowl in the sink)* Why do you say that?

GRANDFATHER: Well, I can't think of any other reason for the big star someone put on my calendar.

TIMMY: *(avoiding his grandfather's eyes)* A star?

GRANDFATHER: That's right. Somebody drew a great big star, smack dab in the middle of today. You can't miss it, that's for sure. *(He chuckles to himself.)* What's the matter? You think I'd forget your birthday? *(Pouring himself a cup of coffee.)* You don't have much faith in your old granddad, do you?

TIMMY: *(returning to his seat)* It wasn't that. It was so... I wouldn't forget. I'm not very good with dates or numbers.

GRANDFATHER: *(stirring in sugar)* Uh-huh.

TIMMY: It's true. Math is my worst subject. *(Changing the subject.)* Could I have a cup of coffee?

GRANDFATHER: *(looks at him)* I guess it wouldn't hurt anything. Just don't tell your mother. *(He comes over to the table with the coffee pot.)* And it's only because it's your birthday.

TIMMY: *(watching him pour it)* Okay.

GRANDFATHER: You want some sugar?

TIMMY: *(nodding)* And cream.

GRANDFATHER: *(shaking his head)* Why don't just you run down to the drugstore and have yourself a milkshake?

TIMMY: This is the way my father always drank it.

GRANDFATHER: That's true. I had forgotten.

(Pause. Timothy begins to reach across the table for the cream.)

Oh, the milk. Sorry. *(Grandfather passes it to him.)*

TIMMY: *(stirring his coffee)* Am I much like my father?

GRANDFATHER: *(sitting at the table)* Oh, I don't know. In some ways, I guess. *(He rises to return the coffee-pot to the counter.)* You can tell me later. *(He stops at the sink, rinsing out the grounds.)* I can tell you one thing about him: he wasn't any good with guns. In fact, he had the worst luck of any man I ever met.

TIMMY: In what way?

GRANDFATHER: Well, all right. *(He returns to his seat, and settles in for a story. While telling it, he puts on and laces his work-shoes.)* One time he and I drove up to Dundas for an auction. Some poor old fellow had died up there and his relatives were selling everything in the house, including some very nice firearms he had collected over

the years. Well, we looked through what they had to offer. And I pointed out one gun to your dad that was a real beaut.

TIMMY: Did he buy it?

GRANDFATHER: Nope. When the time came to start the bidding, your father put his money on an antique Army surplus, bolt-action Japanese rifle from the Second World War.

TIMMY: Was it a good gun?

GRANDFATHER: It was probably among the worst guns I'd ever seen. It had a cracked stock, and was so full of dust and grit that you couldn't see sunshine through the barrel. We spent the rest of that day trying to polish it up, then come to find out I didn't have a bullet in the house that'd fit it.

TIMMY: What'd you do?

GRANDFATHER: Well, we went down to O'Callaghan's, showed him the gun, and asked him what he suggested. Said he didn't have anything *exactly* like that, but thought maybe a Swedish bullet might fit her. By now, I didn't have much confidence in the old gun, and I thought we'd better test it. So we drove out until we found a deserted spot, and I lashed that rifle to the trunk of a big oak tree with some baling wire your father had in the car. Then we took cover. With some strong twine I'd tied to the trigger, I fired that old gun... *(building suspense with each word.)* and it went off like a cannon! The sound shook the trees, knocking acorns down for a mile around us. It had such a terrible kick, it snapped all twelve feet of wire I'd used on it. And the barrel- -well, you couldn't even recognize it. It had blown up like an exploding cigar, sending pieces in every direction. Why, I'll bet a couple pieces made it all the way back to Dundas. *(He laughs at the idea.)*