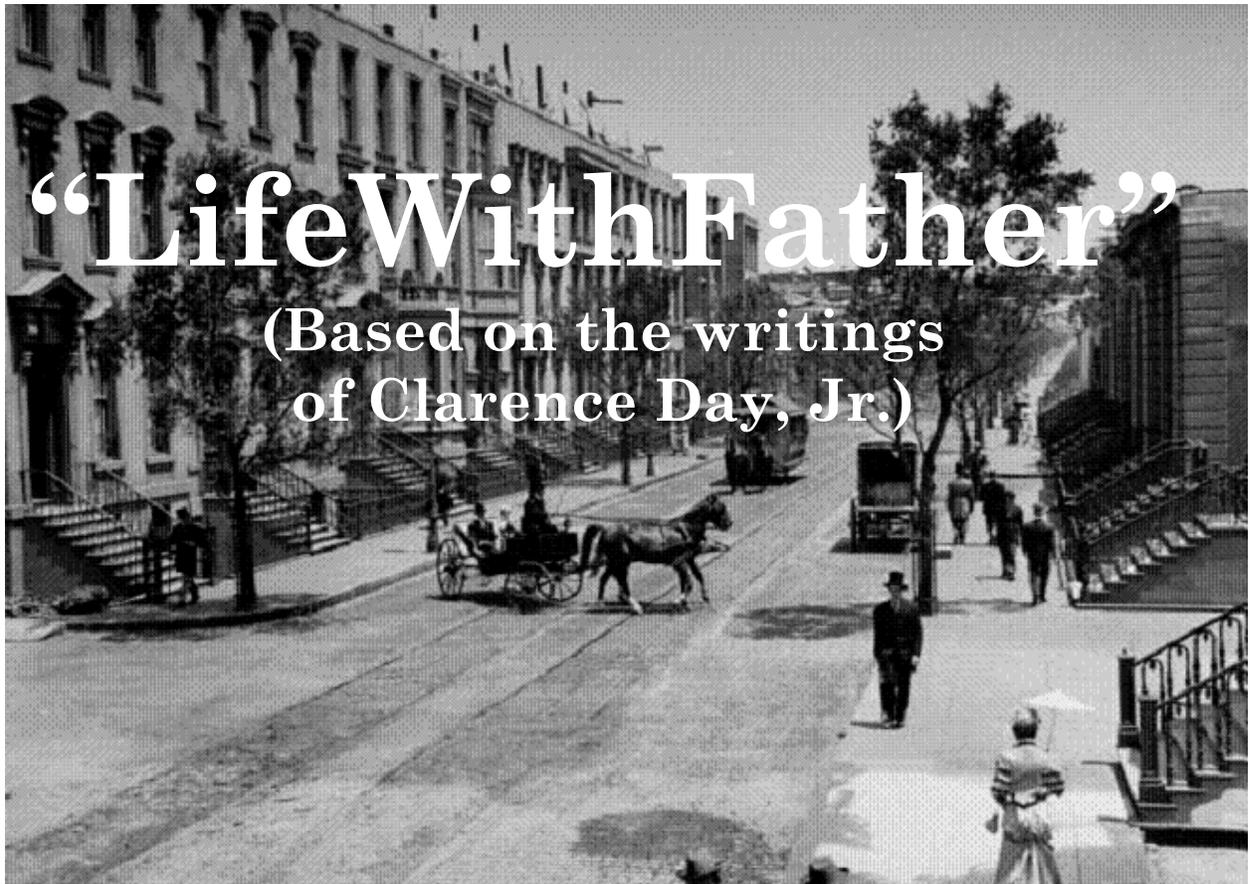


The American Century Theater
Presents...



“Life With Father”

(Based on the writings
of Clarence Day, Jr.)

**by Howard Lindsay
and Russel Crouse**

Audience Guide

Nov. 25–Dec. 6 2008; Jan. 8–24, 2009

Compiled and Edited by Jack Marshall

The American Century Theater was founded in 1994. We are a professional company dedicated to presenting great, important, and neglected American plays of the Twentieth Century... what Henry Luce called "*the American Century.*"

The company's mission is one of rediscovery, enlightenment, and perspective, not nostalgia or preservation. Americans must not lose the extraordinary vision and wisdom of past playwrights, nor can we afford to surrender our moorings to our shared cultural heritage.

Our mission is also driven by a conviction that communities need theater, and theater needs audiences. To those ends, this company is committed to producing plays that challenge and move all Americans, of all ages, origins and points of view. In particular, we strive to create theatrical experiences that entire families can watch, enjoy, and discuss long afterward.

These study guides are part of our effort to enhance the appreciation of these works, so rich in history, content, and grist for debate.



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The Playwrights:

Howard Lindsay (1889-1968) and Russel Crouse (1893-1966)

Lindsay and Crouse were one of the most dynamic, successful and long-lasting theatrical teams in American theater history, though they are almost forgotten today. They live on most vividly, perhaps, in the name of Crouse's daughter, the successful and familiar actress Lindsay Crouse, who has had important roles in such films as David Mamet's "House of Games" and "The Verdict." They co-produced one of America's most enduring comedies, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, wrote the book for one of Rodgers and Hammerstein's most successful musicals, *The Sound of Music*, and wrote the longest-running Broadway play of all time. They deserve to be remembered, as much as Kaufman and Hart or any other Broadway team.

Lindsay was a Harvard-educated actor from New York who managed to appear in some successful national tours while directing plays all through the 1920s. He found his niche when he was hired to adapt the successful book She Loves Me Not for the stage. It was a major Broadway hit, and led to his first teaming with Russel Crouse for a rewrite of a troubled Cole Porter musical. The original book was based on a shipwreck, but the highly-publicized sinking of a ship called the *Morro Castle*, with much loss of life, dictated a new storyline in the interests of good taste. Producer Vinton Freedley hired Lindsay and decided to pair him with another writer, whom Lindsay had never met, in one of the great hunches in theatrical history.

Lindsay's new partner, journalist and playwright Russel McKinley Crouse, had writing in his blood. He was born in Ohio, and his

father was a newspaper editor and publisher. Crouse pursued a newspaper career as well, in Cincinnati and New York, but branched out from journalism after 1930, publishing four books.

When he was recruited in 1934 at the last minute to help overhaul the musical with Lindsay, the production was in such disarray that even its title was in doubt. "Billy Gaxton finally baptized it accidentally," Crouse remembered later. "In answer to a question as to whether he would mind making an entrance a minute after the curtain went up, Mr. Gaxton replied, 'In this kind of a spot, *anything goes!*' We all leaped on the last words and an electrician started spelling them out in electric lights. Mr. Porter dashed off to write a title song. He came in with it the next day -- as gay a melody as any I've heard and with a shrewd, sharp, biting, brilliant lyric."

Just like in the movies!

Anything Goes was an immediate success, and the partnership between Crouse---he knew comedy and wrote the jokes--- and Lindsay, who provided drama, character, pace and structure, was a match made in show biz heaven. "If any two people can be said to think alike, we do," Lindsay once stated. Their professional partnership spanned more than three decades, encompassing fifteen more plays and five screenplays. No theatrical team had success or stayed on speaking terms longer.

Although they began with musicals, Crouse and Lindsay eventually gravitated toward writing non-musical plays as well. Their first major success in this genre was *Life With Father*, which ran over seven years and 3213 Broadway performances, making it the longest-running Broadway production up to that time. Lindsay returned to his acting roots to play Father, Clarence Day Sr., opposite his real-life wife, actress Dorothy Stickney. They both stayed for the entire seven year run.

When Lindsay and Crouse were offered Joseph Kesselring's black farce *Arsenic and Old Lace* in 1940, the two produced the play, and maybe just a little bit more. Kesselring never had written

anything remotely funny (or good) before, and never would again. Many found that his script had more than a few Lindsay and Crouse touches, and the rumor began, never proved or disproved, that *Arsenic and Old Lace* had begun as a hilariously but unintentionally bad melodrama that the two master play doctors secretly turned into an antic comedy, giving the clueless Kesselring all the credit. Whatever the truth was, the result was another huge hit and another long run. They had another triumph as producers in 1949, with the drama *Detective Story*. In 1946, the pair won a Pulitzer Prize in drama for *State of the Union*, a satire of American politics. To keep the jokes up-to-the-minute, Lindsay and Crouse re-wrote sections of the play every day to correspond to actual events.

A second adaptation of a Clarence Day, Jr. reminiscence, *Life With Mother*, got better reviews than the first but was not as successful. In 1950, Lindsay and Crouse wrote the book for another Ethel Merman musical, *Call Me Madam*, and it was a smash. Then came a string of so-so productions and truncated runs. There were whispers that the team had finally run out of ideas and magic. But Lindsay and Crouse had one more home-run left: *The Sound of Music*, in 1959. Their book inspired the Rodgers and Hammerstein songs, and 25 years after *Anything Goes*, the golden team was back on top.

They kept going until 1962, writing the book for the John F. Kennedy-inspired Irving Berlin musical (starring Robert Ryan and Nanette Fabray), *Mr. President*. It was just okay, but nothing to be embarrassed about. Four years later, Crouse died; Lindsay followed two years after that.

Lindsay and Crouse.

What a team.

Life With Father on the Screen

If you are under the age of 65, you not only have probably never seen the play *Life With Father*, you've probably never seen the movie either. It's hard to say which fact is more remarkable. All things considered, the obscurity of the movie may be the winner, given the film's pedigree, its cast, and the fact that a lot more people see old movies on television than go to live theater, more's the pity.

Any producer who buys the screen rights to a famous Broadway play knows he is taking a risk. When the play is famous and well loved, it has built-in name recognition and audience appeal. But when road companies are touring the country and the original Broadway company is going strong, the public may be sated with the story, or worse, have unrealistic expectations that the film cannot meet. All these factors were in play when *Life With Father*, Broadway's longest-running play, was bought with great fanfare by Warner Bros. at the highest price to date for screen rights, making the filming of *Life With Father* an enormous gamble. It was a challenge that studio head Jack Warner, with his producer Robert Buckner and director Michael Curtiz, met cautiously, and not entirely successfully.

No one had predicted the show's enormous popularity. It had been based on Clarence Day, Jr.'s, autobiographical books, God and My Father, Life With Father and Life With Mother. The author, who was practically on his deathbed while writing these books, almost sold the movie rights to Paramount, but changed his mind when he learned the studio intended them as vehicles for W. C. Fields. (Fields was not how Day remembered his father, and who can blame him?)

Five years after the play opened on Broadway, a Chicago company headed by Lillian Gish and a National Company starring her sister Dorothy Gish were sent out on tours. Lillian Gish immediately advised her friend, silent film super-star Mary Pickford, that the role of Lavinia would be perfect for Pickford's long-awaited movie comeback, and urged her to buy the screen rights. But Pickford

procrastinated, and soon all the major studios were trying to outbid one another for the rights.

Actor William Powell felt that the role of Clarence Day, Sr., could be the greatest of his entire career, and urged his studio, M-G-M, to buy the rights for him to star in the adaptation. But rumors swirled around M-G-M that if the studio succeeded in buying *Life With Father*, the title role would go to Spencer Tracy, whose box-office following was bigger than Powell's. In the end, Warner Bros. outbid M-G-M, agreeing to give the authors and the original investors a down payment of \$500,000, plus half of all profits. In addition, Lindsay and Crouse and the widow of Clarence Day, Jr., were to serve as technical advisers. No word of the play's text could be cut or changed without their permission; indeed, they were to have veto power over every aspect of the film.

As you might guess, such terms were virtually unheard of even then, and are impossible today.

Then the problems of casting began. Lindsay, the star of the play, made a screen test but hated the way his voice sounded on the film (undoubtedly the same as it sounded in the theater, however!) and withdrew himself from consideration. Warner asked M-G-M to loan out Powell. The studio agreed, and the public and the press voiced hearty approval. (Tracy, meanwhile, ended up starring in a very successful *Life With Father*-inspired comedy "Father of the Bride," as well as its sequel.)

Casting Lavinia proved more difficult. As the top Warner Bros. actress, Bette Davis had first refusal on any important female role. She worked hard on her makeup, hair, and characterization, but simply could not convey the daintiness and innocence that conceal Lavinia's will of iron. Pickford made several tests and all agreed that she would be perfect in the role, since Lavinia was a somewhat older variant on Pickford's most popular silent screen roles. Warner wondered, however, whether Pickford had any following after a thirteen-year absence from acting.

Director Michael Curtiz (best known today as the director of "Casablanca") held out for Irene Dunne, whose "Anna and the King

of Siam” (1946)---the model for the musical *The King and I*, and also a terrific film that is hard to find on television---had just been released to enormous success. Curtiz lobbied Dunne, but she repeatedly rejected the role. She thought Lavinia was silly, and she did not see how she could make sympathetic a character who manipulated and tricked her husband and who burst into tears when she did not get her way. But Curtiz used all his considerable powers of persuasion, and finally Dunne called Warner to accept the role. Had she waited just a few minutes longer, it is said, Mary Pickford would have gotten the part, perhaps ushering in a comeback for one of cinema’s true immortals.

Although Powell’s is the title role, Dunne, a mega-star in her own right, was not about to concede top billing. Her agents met with his and a compromise was arranged: half the prints would bear her name first, and the other half would have Powell’s at the top. They would flip a coin (!) for the New York premiere, with the loser getting first place for the Los Angeles premiere. First-run theaters would be required to alternate prints, with advertising alternating the same way.

Actors!

The first chore was to dye all cast members' hair red. Genetics revealed that two red-headed parents would probably have all red-headed children, but each would be a different shade. Only Martin Milner (much later of “Adam 12” fame on TV), who was portraying Whitney, was a natural red-head, so the rest of the cast reported to the Westmore Beauty Parlour one Sunday morning to get their proper tints: Powell deep auburn, Dunne strawberry blonde, and the children in various shades in between. When it came time to rinse the dye off, the beauticians found that the water had been turned off during street repairs. Panic set in as the operators struggled to remove the dye before it turned the hair purple, launching cast members on an unwanted career track playing Martians in science fiction movies. Finally, one of them found a vat full of cold cream and applied it by the handful to deactivate the dye.

Shooting started in August of 1946, amidst much fanfare. Warner Bros. tore down its largest exterior set, a Viennese street, and

replaced it with a replica of Madison Avenue in the 1890's. The Day house was painted and furnished mostly in shades of green, mauve, and blue, which made a becoming setting for the red hair. Milo Anderson, who designed the costumes, said that he was careful to use a green and blue plaid for the dress that Dunne wore through much of the film, and as Dunne was frequently required to run up and down flights of stairs, he kept the bustles on her skirts as small as possible while maintaining period accuracy.

On the stage, *Life With Father* takes place entirely in the Days' dining and drawing rooms. In writing the screenplay, Donald Ogden Stewart avoided changing the dialogue but, wherever possible, moved the action to other parts of the house, the street, and the back garden. He wrote brief scenes in the church, Delmonico's restaurant, and McCreeries' Department Store, playing out action which had only been referred to in the play. Lindsay and Crouse were on the set most of the time and occasionally reworded sentences to please Curtiz. They did not exercise their veto power unreasonably, nor did Mrs. Clarence Day. She approved of Dunne's characterization and even lent Dunne several pieces of jewelry that the real Lavinia Day had owned.

Curtiz had the reputation of working very fast, but the awesome reputation of *Life With Father*, plus Warner's stated belief that the film would be "another "Gone With the Wind" slowed him down. Powell and Dunne's reputations as comedians in the 1930's had come from quickly made comedies using much improvisation, and the necessity of sticking rigidly to the famous lines of *Life With Father* did not permit them their customary freedom. And it may be that their performances suffered as a result.

A simple story in few sets with a small cast which could have been filmed easily in six weeks was scheduled for a ponderous (for the time) twelve, then ran over into sixteen. Much of the delay was due to Powell's inexplicable absences from the set. The company would return after lunch, wait a few hours, then be told to go home. Although Powell never complained, he often seemed in great pain. Later, he revealed that he was battling cancer during this period.

The film was cut and scored, and the World Premiere was delayed until August 15, 1947, the eighth anniversary of the Broadway premiere of the play. The reviews were good, but far from raves. Critics agreed that Clarence Day was a once-in-a-lifetime role for Powell, and although his character's frequent explosions of "damn" had to be altered because of the oppressive Hays Code then in effect. However, Powell put enormous energy into his substitute "Egads," and substantially compensated for the loss. Dunne, Elizabeth Taylor, Jimmy Lydon, and Edmund Gwenn, among others, all received favorable mention but not enthusiastic praise. Edwin Schallert of the Los Angeles Times was probably writing what more respectful critics were thinking when he commented that the film version of *Life With Father* had a "lack of spontaneity" that the play had avoided on stage.

Needless to say, the film was not to be another "Gone With the Wind," and it had been absurd to hold it to that standard, no matter how popular and famous its source was. *Life With Father* is made up of simple stories, best told quickly and with affection; it is not an epic, and cannot compete with the Civil War. Its massive production values dwarfed its charms. The movie got four nominations at the Academy Awards. It did not win any Oscars, but it did respectably at the box office, placing well on Variety's all-time highest-grossing film list at the time. Warner Bros. was happy, as it earned back the sizable outlay and had a very good profit.

"Life With Father" was reissued in 1948 on the first anniversary of the initial release, but after that it faded away. When Warner Bros. films were first sold to television, "Life With Father" could not be included in the package because the studio had originally agreed not to distribute the film to any media after 1954. (It was one of many films starring Irene Dunne that met a similar fate for various reasons, resulting in her strange obscurity today despite a long career that was every bit as successful as Ginger Rogers, Joan Crawford and other of her contemporaries.) The film sat on the shelf, in limbo, for sixteen years, until a new agreement between Warner Bros. and the authors and producer made possible a network television sale.

But by that time, both the play and the film had been almost forgotten. Powell was no longer well-remembered, even for “The Thin Man.” Dunne, who had been absent from television and movies for decades, was *completely* forgotten. Many viewers then, as now, got it mixed up with “Cheaper by the Dozen.” The movie that should have kept memories of the play alive itself had faded out of our cultural memory, just as Clarence Day, Jr.’s books had gone out of print.

“LIFE WITH FATHER”

Production Credits: *(from the internet movie database)*

Release Date: 1947

Production Line: Robert Buckner for Warner Bros.

Director: Michael Curtiz

Cinematographer: Peverell Marley and William V. Skall

Costume design - Milo Anderson

Run Time: 128 minutes

Cast:

Clarence Day, Sr. - William Powell

Lavinia Day - Irene Dunne

Mary Skinner - Elizabeth Taylor

Cousin Cora - Zasu Pitts

Clarence Day, Jr. - Jimmy Lindon

Reverend Dr. Lloyd - Edmund Gwenn

John Day - Martin Milner

Margaret - Emma Dunn

Dr. Humphries - Moroni Olsen

Mrs. Whitehead - Elisabeth Risdon

Harlan - Derek Scott

Whitney - Johnny Calkins

Annie - Heather Wilde
Policeman - Monte Blue
Maggie - Queenie Leonard
Girl In Delmonico's - Arlene Dahl

Studios named in Production Credits: Warner Bros.

Screenplay (Author): Donald Ogden Stewart, Howard Lindsay,
Russel Crouse, and Clarence Day Jr.

The Source:

Clarence Shepard Day, Jr. (1874–1935)

Day was born in New York City, and like his father, whom he was to immortalize in his books, he joined the New York Stock Exchange, becoming a partner in his father's Wall Street brokerage firm. Day enlisted in the Navy in 1898, but developed crippling arthritis and spent the remainder of his life as a semi-invalid.

This gave him lots of time to write, and write he did. He had already completed four books (*This Simian World* (1920, essays); *The Story of the Yale University Press* (1920); *The Crow's Nest* (1921); and *Thoughts Without Words* (1928)) and been a long-time contributor to *The New Yorker* when he gathered up some of his autobiographical *New Yorker* columns and expanded them into a book, *God and My Father* (1932). It became a best-seller, as did two more book about his childhood, *Life with Father* (1935), and *Life with Mother* (1937). These three books became the inspiration for Lindsay and Crouse's *Life With Father*, which opened on Broadway on November 8, 1939, and became the longest running non-musical show in Broadway history.

Day was an early and vocal advocate of giving women the right to vote, and contributed satirical cartoons for U.S. suffrage publications in the 1910s. James Moske, an archivist with the New York Public Library who arranged and catalogued the library's Clarence Day Papers, said that "he was fascinated by the changing roles of men and women in American society as Victorian conceptions of marriage, family, and domestic order unraveled in the first decades of the twentieth century."

Day sometimes wrote his stories and essays using the pseudonym B. H. Arkwright. His most lasting quotation, though there were many, was probably this:

The world of books is the most remarkable creation of man. Nothing else that he builds ever lasts. Monuments fall, nations perish, civilizations grow old and die out; and, after an era of darkness, new races build others. But in the world of books are volumes that have seen this happen again and again, and yet live on, still young, still as fresh as the day they were written, still telling men's hearts of the hearts of men centuries dead.

Day died in New York City shortly after finishing Life with Father, years before the epic success on Broadway or in Hollywood of the dramatic versions of his life and family. His final five books were published after his death.

THE GIFT OF SONG

By Clarence Day, Jr. (From Life With Father)

One day when I was about ten years old, and George eight, Father suddenly remembered an intention of his to have us taught music. There were numerous other things that he felt every boy ought to learn, such as swimming, blacking his own shoes, and book-

keeping; to say nothing of school work, in which he expected a boy to excel. He now recalled that music, too, should be included in our education. He held that all children should be taught to play on something, and sing.

He was right, perhaps. At any rate, there is a great deal to be said for his programme. On the other hand, there are children and children. I had no ear for music.

Father was the last man to take this into consideration, however: he looked upon children as raw material that a father should mould. When I said I couldn't sing, he said nonsense. He went to the piano. He played a scale, cleared his throat, and sang *Do, re, mi*, and the rest. He did this with relish. He sang it again, high and low. He then turned to me and told me to sing it, too, while he accompanied me.

I was bashful. I again told him earnestly that I couldn't sing. He laughed. "What do *you* know about what you can or can't do?" And he added in a firm, kindly voice, "Do whatever I tell you." He was always so sure of himself that I couldn't help having faith in him. For all I knew, he could detect the existence of organs in a boy of which that boy had no evidence. It was astonishing, certainly, but if he said I could sing, I could sing.

I planted myself respectfully before him. He played the first note. He never wasted time in explanations; that was not his way; and I had only the dimmest understanding of what he wished me to do. But I struck out, haphazard, and chanted the extraordinary syllables loudly.

"No, no, no!" said Father, disgustedly.

We tried it again.

"No, no, no!" He struck the notes louder.

We tried it repeatedly. . . .

I gradually saw that I was supposed to match the piano, in some way, with my voice. But how such a thing could be done I had no notion whatever. The kind of sound a piano made was different from the sound of a voice. And the various notes--I could hear that each one had its own sound, but that didn't help me out any: they were all total strangers. One end of the piano made deep noises, the other end shrill; I could make my voice deep, shrill, or medium; but that was the best I could do.

At the end of what seemed to me an hour, I still stood at attention, while Father still tried energetically to force me to sing. It was an absolute deadlock. He wouldn't give in, and I couldn't. Two or three times I had felt for a moment I was getting the hang of it, but my voice wouldn't do what I wanted; I don't think it could. Anyhow, my momentary grasp of the problem soon faded. It felt so queer to be trying to do anything exact with my voice. And Father was so urgent about it, and the words so outlandish. *Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do!* What a nightmare! though by this time he had abandoned his insistence on my learning the scale; he had reduced his demands to my singing one single note: *Do*. I continually opened my mouth wide, as he had instructed me, and shouted the word *Do* at random, hoping it might be the pitch. He snorted, and again struck the piano. I again shouted *Do*.

George sat on the sofa by the parlour door, watching me with great sympathy. He always had the easy end of it. George was a good brother; he looked up to me, loved me, and I couldn't help loving him; but I used to get tired of being his path-breaker in encounters with Father. All Father's experience as a parent was obtained at my hands. He was a man who had many impossible hopes for his children, and it was only as he tried these on me that he slowly became disillusioned. He clung to each hope tenaciously: he surrendered none without a long struggle; after which he felt baffled and indignant, and I felt done up, too. At such times if only he had repeated the attack on my brothers, it might have been hard on them, but at least it would have given me a slight rest. But no, when he had had a disappointment, he turned to new projects. And as I was the eldest, the new were always tried out on

me. George and the others trailed along happily, in comparative peace, while I perpetually confronted Father in a wrestling match upon some new ground. . . .

Mother came into the room in her long swishing skirts. Father was obstinately striking the piano for the nine thousandth time, and I was steadily though hopelessly calling out *Do*.

"Why, Clare! What *are* you doing?" Mother cried.

Father jumped up. I suppose that at heart he was relieved at her interruption--it allowed him to stop without facing the fact of defeat. But he strongly wished to execute any such maneuver without loss of dignity, and Mother never showed enough regard for this, from his point of view. Besides, he was full of a natural irritation at the way things resisted him. He had visited only a part of this on me. The rest he now hurled at her. He said would she kindly go away and leave him alone with his sons. He declared he would not be interfered with. He banged the piano lid shut. He said he was "sick and tired of being systematically thwarted and hindered," and he swore he would be damned if he'd stand it. Off he went to his room.

"You'll only have to come right back down again," Mother called after him. "The soup's being put on the table."

"I don't want any dinner."

"Oh, Clare! Please! It's oyster soup!"

"Don't want any." He slammed his room door.

We sat down, frightened, at table. I was exhausted. But the soup was a life-saver. It was more like a stew, really. Rich milk, oyster juice, and big oysters. I put lots of small hard crackers in mine, and one slice of French toast. That hot toast soaked in soup was delicious, only there wasn't much of it, and as Father particularly liked it, we had to leave it for him. But there was plenty of soup: a great tureen full. Each boy had two helpings.

Father came down in the middle of it, still offended, but he ate his full share. I guess he was somewhat in need of a life-saver himself. The chops and peas and potatoes came on. He gradually forgot how we'd wronged him.

There were too many things always happening at our family dinners, too many new vexations, or funny things, for him to dwell on the past.

But though he was willing enough, usually, to drop small resentments, nevertheless there were certain recollections that remained in his mind--such as the feeling that Mother sometimes failed to understand his plans for our welfare, and made his duty needlessly hard for him by her interference; and the impression that I was an awkward little boy, and great trouble to train.

Not that these thoughts disturbed him, or lessened at all his self-confidence. He lit his cigar after dinner and leaned back philosophically, taking deep vigorous puffs with enjoyment, and drinking black coffee. When I said, "Good night, Father," he smiled at me like a humorous potter, pausing to consider--for the moment--an odd bit of clay. Then he patted me affectionately on the shoulder and I went up to bed.

TV Domestic Comedy

By Nina C. Leibman

[The popularity and long stay of Life With Father established the home based situation comedy as an American entertainment staple. It is not surprising that one of the first situation comedies was the TV "Life With Father," starring Leon Errol. After that, the floodgates opened. Here, TV scholar Nina Liebman discusses what Life With Father has wrought.]

Domestic comedy is the term for a generic category coined by Horace Newcomb in his *TV: The Most Popular Art* (1974). In U.S. television the phrase provides a useful means of distinguishing

between situation comedy, and the more broad-based, "comedy." Domestic comedies are identified by a character-based humor as opposed to that originating in a series of confusions or complications. Within a domestic comedy, qualities such as warmth, familial relationships, moral growth and audience inclusiveness predominate. In each episode a character experiences some sort of learning experience, often motivated by some ethical trial or test. The humor emanates from the audience's familiarity with the characters and their relationships with one another, and the overwhelming harmony of each story encourages the audience to problem-solve along with the characters.

Originally, domestic comedies were literally house-bound, and generally characterized by their stereotypical nuclear family protagonists. Thus 1950's programs like *Leave it to Beaver*, *The Donna Reed Show*, and *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* were considered seminal examples. Young Beaver, Mary, or Ricky experienced some sort of lightly-depicted minor dilemma (a lost sweater, making two dates for the same night, lying to a pen pal) which Ward, Donna or Ozzie then neatly dispatched of with some well-pointed words of advice. The child learned the moral lesson, only to be confronted with a new predicament the following week.

With time, the definitions of domestic comedy have changed and expanded. First, critical work has begun to explore whether many of these domestic comedies were in fact comedies at all. In my "Living Room Lectures," I argue that despite the presence of a laugh track, most of these programs contained more generic similarity to domestic melodrama than any sort of comedic categories. Programs such as *Father Knows Best*, with their hyperbolic acting styles and crises, their reliance upon peripety and coincidence in problem-solving, their thematic and structural dependency on repetitive musical motifs, and their obsession with issues of gender and generational conflict, convincingly associates them more with their 1950's cinematic dramatic counterparts than with their television situation comedy cousins.

Second, domestic comedies need not take place in a suburban home to claim membership within the domestic comedy genre. Workplace domestic comedies such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Cheers*, *Murphy Brown*, and *Ellen*, construct character-based comedies out of the ersatz familial relationships of a group of friends or co-workers. As in their more literal family forebears, these comedies place an emphasis on moral growth and development, warmth, and viewer identification in a representational (rather than presentational format).

Generic blends and hybrids cause further evolution of the term. Some programs such as *The Brady Bunch*, originated with a situation-type premise: what happens when a widower with three sons marries a widow with three daughters? Eventually, however (often within the first three episodes), the situation no longer motivates the central narrative and the individual episodes deal with topics that fall more neatly into the domestic comedy camp. For *The Brady Bunch*, then, moral imperatives provide the comedy when Greg tries smoking, Marcia is caught lying about a special prom guest, and Jan's resentment of her prettier, older sister motivates her to experiment with antisocial behavior. Similarly, domestic comedies, such as *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, vacillate between outrageous acts of slapstick and confusion (Laura dyes her hair blonde, Laura gets her toe stuck in a bathtub faucet) to more poignant and morally complex episodes (Richie adopts a duck, Buddy gets fired). A program such as this (with stars who excel at physical comedy) might originate as a domestic premise, but then, in light of Van Dyke's prowess for farce, reconfigure the narratives into situational exercises of complexity and confusion.

Domestic comedies of the 1970s sprang from two main sources. Norman Lear's were true familial settings in which the ironic familial head, Archie Bunker on *All in the Family*, George Jefferson on *The Jeffersons*, Maude on the program which bears her name, proved both a verbal provocateur and a victim while undergoing subtle moments of moral growth. Grant Tinker's *MTM* productions was home to a plethora of successful workplace

domestic comedies such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *The Bob Newhart Show*, and *Rhoda*. Each of these programs reconfigured domestic troubles into professional ones and transformed business relationships into familial ones by ascribing certain familial roles to the office workers--the cranky boss becomes the father, the ditzy newsman becomes a wild brother, etc.

During the 1980s domestic comedies retreated into near extinction, emerging in neoclassical incarnations such as *Family Ties*, and *The Cosby Show*. Like the domestic comedies of the 1950s, these programs seem closer to domestic melodrama, with a particular emphasis on gender and class-based issues. The 1990s entries into the field are a skewed blend of sitcom, domestic comedy and family melodrama. *Roseanne*, and *Grace Under Fire*, for example, tackle the topics of incest, spouse abuse, alcoholism, masturbation, and unemployment within the hyperbolic representational stance of family melodrama. Yet the sarcasm and sheer cynicism of the central characters diffuse any seriousness associated with the problem, moving them out of melodrama and back into the generic sphere of domestic comedy. At the same time, the programs often insert situation comedy routines (drunkenness, mistaken identity, extravagant production numbers) right in the midst of a particularly bleak episode, rendering its generic identity cloudy at best.

Domestic comedies remain a staple of series television, but, as with most television genres in an advanced evolutionary phase, the category has been expanded upon and complicated by its fusion with other generic elements.



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An American Century Christmas (A Holiday Special)

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The epic story of Bigger Thomas, based on Wright's classic novel.

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