

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Before I Get Old

by Chris Edmund

EXTRACT

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BEFORE I GET OLD

Chris Edmund

THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION WAS PERFORMED BY EIGHT MALE AND EIGHT FEMALE ACTORS.

FEMALE.

ACTOR ONE ROSE, ANNE'S MUM.

ACTOR TWO GEORGINA.

ACTOR THREE ANNE

ACTOR FOUR PONGO, CONGERS MUM.

ACTOR FIVE JULIE, SYBILS MUM.

ACTOR SIX SARAH, SEX ED TEACHER, GEORGINA'S MUM, DOCTOR.

ACTOR SEVEN SYBIL, DAVIDS MUM.

ACTOR EIGHT MURIEL, TEACHER, NURSE.

MALE

ACTOR ONE ERNIE, ROSE'S DAD, TEACHER.

ACTOR TWO TERRY, BARBER.

ACTOR THREE PAUL, DAVID, TERRY'S DAD.

ACTOR FOUR ERIC, DAVID'S DAD.

ACTOR FIVE TOM.

ACTOR SIX DOUG

ACTOR SEVEN HENRY, HOLY JOE.

ACTOR EIGHT CONGER, PONGO'S DAD.

ON A SCREEN A UNION JACK FLUTTERS, BLACK AND WHITE IMAGES OF THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO, CHURCHILL, THE CORONATION, CONQUERING OF EVEREST.

IMAGES FADE.

SCREEN PART ONE: CHILDISH THINGS

MUSIC. THE CAST RUNS ON AND SINGS 'JERUSALEM'
IT'S A PRIMARY SCHOOL CONCERT. THE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN DRILLED IN A ROUTINE WHICH ENDS IN THE WAVING OF THE UNION JACK.

And did those feet in ancient time Walk upon England's mountains green? And was the holy Lamb of God On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine Shine forth upon our clouded hills? And was Jerusalem builded here Among these dark Satanic mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold: Bring me my arrows of desire: Bring me my spear: O clouds unfold! Bring me my chariot of fire.

I will not cease from mental fight, Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand Till we have built Jerusalem In England's green and pleasant land.

SCHOOL BELL. THE CAST RUNS OFF LEAVING FOUR BOYS WHO SIT TOGETHER IN A OLD BOMB SHELTER. HENRY WEARS A GAS MASK. ERNIE HAS A TORCH WHICH HE USES TO SHINE ON HIS OWN FACE AND ON THE OTHERS.

ERNIE: In the war my Dad killed a man.

DOUG Yeah?

ERNIE Yeah.

DOUG How?

HENRY Yeah, how?

ERNIE He was in a ravine...

ERIC In Germany is this?

ERNIE A ravine in Germany, yeah.

DOUG Cor!

ERNIE Five Germans came into the ravine...

HENRY And just your dad?

ERNIE Yes.

HENRY On his tod?

ERNIE His comrades had been gunned down.

PAUSE

DOUG Go on.

ERNIE And they struggled

DOUG Struggled?

HENRY Struggled.

ERNIE Against my Dad

HENRY Five against your dad?

ERIC Bloody krauts.

DOUG Damn krauts.

PAUSE

ERNIE And then he killed them

HENRY All five?

DOUG With his bare hands?

ERIC All five with his bare hands?

ERNIE Yes.

PAUSE

ERNIE He'd mislaid his bayonet.

PAUSE

ERNIE Did your Dad kill anyone?

DOUG No.

ERNIE Yours?

ERIC He was in the Catering Corps .

ERNIE Catering?

ERIC Slew many a carrot, my old man.

ERNIE Yours Henry?

HENRY He had flat feet.

ERNIE Why didn't he kill someone Doug?

DOUG I don't know, Ernie.

ERNIE Was he a coward?

DOUG He just doesn't like talking about it.

ERNIE Why not?

DOUG My dad says if you can talk about the war, you weren't really there.

ERIC Fair enough.

HENRY Fair doos.

MUM (OFF) Tea's on the table boys!

ERIC Thanks Mum!

OTHER BOYS Thanks Mrs. Ball!

PAUSE

THEY ALL CRAWL OFF LIKE SOLDIERS.

HENRY How many gears has an Italian tank got?

ERIC How many?

HENRY One forward three reverse.

THEY LAUGH

ERIC What do you call a Japanese pilot?

HENRY What?

ERIC A nip in the air.

DOUG Good one Eric.

THE KIDS LAUGH. LIGHTS DOWN ON BOYS

LIGHTS UP ON GIRLS WHO ARE SINGING

'RING A RING A ROSY A POCKET FULL OF POSIES, ATISHOO ATISHOO WE ALL FALL DOWN. '

SARAH Did your dad kill a man, Rose?

ROSE No.

PONGO Nor mine.

MURIEL My dad might have.

SARAH That's awful.

MURIEL Well perhaps he didn't.

GEORGINA If mine had we'd never have heard the end of it.

PAUSE. THEY LOOK AT SYBIL.

ROSE Anyway, my mum nearly killed my dad, when he had a waz on the lawn when he came back from the pub last night.

GEORGINA That's disgusting.

MURIEL Really disgusting.

ROSE I know it's disgusting.

SYBIL It kills the grass.

PONGO Does my hair look funny, George?

SYBIL It goes yellow.

PONGO Does it?

MURIEL Kills it dead as dead as a doornail.

GEORGINA No.

SYBIL Yellow patches.

PONGO Sure?

GEORGINA Yes, Pongo.

MURIEL It's just what it is your hair, like life.

GEORGE It's just..... unusual.

PONGO Oh.

SARAH Where's Anne?

ALL Anne!

PONGO She's fed up and took her dog for a walk.

SYBIL On Windmill Hill.

MURIEL Full of knots and curls, hair and life.

SYBIL It's entirely green, the hill.

SARAH Why is she fed up?

GEORGINA She's just fed up.

MURIEL Twists and turns.

SYBIL Except when there's snow on it, then it's white.

PONGO She's always fed up

SYBIL It's because she's Russian, she's pining for the steppes.

MURIEL Steppes?

JULIE Only her dad's Russian.

GEORGINA Her mum was born in Luton eight miles away.

SARAH (as if it's obvious) Pining in her SOUL.

PAUSE

ALL Oh, right, yeah.

SARAH My parents have been to Russia.

JULIE Well, we went to Butlins at Clacton this year, and my dad was crowned King of the Camp and snogged the Queen of the Camp who was an old hag about forty, in front of hundreds of campers, which really pissed mum off, seeing as she had a new baby.

SARAH My dad's a Quantity Surveyor and we don't go to Holiday camps.

JULIE So what?

PONGO So what?

JULIE So what?

SARAH We go to Eastbourne or the Isle of Wight.

JULIE Big deal.

PONGO Big deal.

ROSE Mine isn't what your dad is. He's not anything.

MURIEL How can he not be anything?

PONGO That's weird, Rose.

JULIE My dad also bets on the horses and mum says he'll bring us to ruin.

SARAH It doesn't mean I'm a snob.

JULIE Rack and dire ruin.

GEORGINA I like my dad even though he's got varicose veins.

ROSE My dad's got a varicose head.