Life With Father
by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse
The American Century Theater presents

Life With Father
by Howard Lindsay & Russel Crouse

November 24 – December 6, 2008
January 8 – 24, 2009

Gunston Theatre II
2700 South Lang Street
Arlington, Virginia

Director: Rip Claassen
Producer: Sherri Haddad
Assistant Director: Tiffany Ford
Stage Manager: David Olmsted
Set Designer: Trena Weiss–Null
Lighting Designer: AnnMarie Castrigno
Technical Director: Michael Null
Costume & Properties Designer: Ceci Albert
Hair & Makeup Designer: Jen Durham

Synopsis of Scenes
The entire play takes place in the morning room of the Day house on Madison Avenue. New York City. The time is Early Summer 1892.

Act I
Scene I: Breakfast time. An early summer morning.
Scene II: Tea time. The same day.

15–minute intermission

Act II
Scene I: Sunday, right after church. A week later.
Scene II: Breakfast time. Two days later.

10 minute intermission

Act III
Scene I: Midafternoon. A month later.
Scene II: Breakfast time. The next morning.

Cast
Clarence Day, Sr. .................................................. Joe Cronin
Vinnie Day ............................................... Deborah Rinn Critzer
Clarence Day, Jr. ............................................ Karl Bittner
John Day ............................................................ Billy Puschel
Whitney Day .................................................. Paul Hogan
Harlan Day ......................................................... Scott Clark
Cora .................................................................... Sarah Holt
Mary Skinner ..................................................... Megan Graves
Rev. Lloyd .......................................................... Brian Crane
Dr. Humphries .................................................. K. Clayton
Dr. Somers .......................................................... Seth Vaught
Margaret ............................................................. Karen Lange
Annie ................................................................. Shelby Sours
Delia ................................................................. Laura Rocklyn
Nora .................................................................. Tamra Testerman
Maggie ............................................................... Lexi Haddad

Production Staff

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Director ........................................................ Rip Claassen
Assistant Director ........................................... Tiffany Ford
Stage Manager ................................................ David Olmsted
Assistant Stage Managers ............................ Lexi Haddad, Richard Yingling
Technical Director .......................................... Michael Null
Set Designer ..................................................... Trena Weiss–Null
Lighting Designer .......................................... AnnMarie Castrigno
Lighting Technician ....................................... David Olmsted
Sound Designer ................................................ Bill Gordon
Sound Technician ............................................... Grant Marshall
Properties and Costume Designer .................. Ceci Albert
Hair and Makeup Designer ............................. Jen Durham
Properties Assistant ............................................ Kate Dorrell
Costume Assistants ................................. Margaret Mook, Susan Sedgwick, Brook Purinton
Photographer .................................................. Micah Hutz
Program and Graphic ...................................... Michael Sherman

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

British Players, Olney Theatre Company, Anndi Daileske, St. Mark’s Players, Little Theatre of Alexandria, Reverend Paul Abernathy, Geoff and Genie Baskir, Don Barton, Devorah Firestone, Eileen Ferrell, Kathleen Carpenter Kester, Backstage, Inc., The Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources, Cultural Affairs Division, and all others whose names were not available at the time that this program went to press.

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Supported in part by the Virginia Commission of the Arts and the Arlington County Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, Cultural Affairs Division.

PLEASE NOTE:
Please turn off any cell-phones and other noise making devices. The use of recording equipment and/or the taking of photographs during the performance are strictly prohibited.
Artistic Director’s Notes: Life With Father (1939) by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse

Life With Father is the all-time most popular play in Broadway history, with a 3,224 performance run that will almost certainly never be equaled. If the play were an operetta, it would be The Mikado; if it were a TV show, it would be I Love Lucy. If it were dessert, it would be a vanilla ice-cream cone. So why haven’t you ever seen this play before?

Don’t feel guilty about it, like I do about never getting around to reading Huckleberry Finn. Ol’ Huck is sitting right there on my bookshelf, but Life With Father is almost never produced and hasn’t had frequent revivals on professional or amateur stages in almost half a century. This kind of circumstance will always attract the attention of The American Century Theater, which exists to remedy such injustices, but Life with Father is an especially interesting case. It ruled the theatrical roost at a time when more plays opened on Broadway in a typical season than now open in a decade. The competition was especially fierce, because it was the Golden Age of American playwrights: Phillip Barry, S. N. Behrman, Moss Hart, Lillian Hellman, Sydney Howard, George S. Kaufman, Eugene O’Neill, Elmer Rice and many others vied for popularity with critics and audiences. But Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, a playwriting and producing team that also wrote State of the Union, the books for the classic musicals Call Me Madam and The Sound of Music, and who probably were the real authors of Arsenic and Old Lace (but that’s another story) ended up on top. Life with Father must have had something special, and it did.

What it had was “heart,” and more. The play opened in the teeth of a Depression (Thank goodness THAT isn’t going to happen again!) when America was in a mood to reflect on happier, simpler times. Clarence Day, Jr. had written a popular series of recollections for the New Yorker about his childhood in the late 19th Century, and its combination of typical big family nonsense, memorable characters and easy humor seemed made for the stage. Playwright Lindsay felt so close to the material that he decided to play Clarence Day Senior, himself, and cast his wife, Dorothy Stickney, as Vinnie, Mrs. Day. The Lindsays rang true as the Days, the family seemed genuine and loving, and the audience was transported, while laughing, to another time and place it knew well.

As but is frequently the case with popular plays, the passing of time changed the equation. After a few decades, audiences no longer looked at the Day’s living circumstances with any recognition: the play was intended to be “dated,” but it had become an unfamiliar date, with references that were nostalgic in the Forties but that became mysterious as the years went on. Producing the show was always tricky because of the need for juvenile actors, but the costume pieces and props became more difficult to come by as they approached museum piece status.

Meanwhile, success bred imitation, and imitation breeds contempt. The play became the template for an entire genre, the family sitcom, especially the classic Fifties and Sixties species featuring lovable but fallible Dads: Father Knows Best, Bachelor Father, The Life of Riley, My Three Sons, and many more, stretching all the way to The Brady Bunch. This formula has been so much a part of the pop culture scene for so long that it is hard to imagine it ever having been new but it was when Life with Father opened in 1939.

The 1947 movie version, which itself is seldom seen any more, was anticipated with the breathlessness and hype that surrounded the opening of Gone with the Wind. It had an all-star cast (Williams Powell, Irene Dunne, Elizabeth Taylor), the director of Casablanca (Michael Curtiz), and a huge budget. But although they liked the actors’ performances, critics thought something was missing in the movie…charm, perhaps, or maybe spontaneity. At any rate, everyone agreed that the play was better live. That didn’t stop TV from launching a Life with Father show in 1953, the beginning of the parade of clones.

None of the copies equaled the original, but after a while, America forgot what the original was like, and why they fell in love with it. The play that had been frequently compared to the great landmarks of the U.S., places that one went to see to understand the essence of a nation, its people and its values, not only wasn’t being seen any more, it couldn’t be seen. That just doesn’t seem right.

So let’s see it. And I think I’ll take Huckleberry down from the shelf, too.

Jack Marshall,
Artistic Director
The American Century Theater

Director’s Notes: Life With Father (1939) by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse

Life With Father is not only the longest running non-musical play in Broadway history, but it is the “Father” of the family sitcom. Its influence has been seen in shows as varied as The Honeymooners, Happy Days (Marian Ross debuted the maid Nora in the TV version of Life With Father), Murphy Brown, Married with Children and the rest. Think Murphy Brown’s secretaries while watching the rotating maids!!

So, why revive this play when there are so many updated takeoffs? Simple. This is a play about an all American family, as many of the sitcoms that followed it were. The original books by Mr. Day hit a familiar cord with America, and the play version conquered the Great White Way, leading Hollywood and television to take notice. Many call Life With Father dated…but it is well loved. I feel a play with its simple truths can never be dated. Hopefully, the family will never go out of style. Our very culture owes this sweet show so much.

Life With Father is truly a forgotten national treasure. The characters feel things we feel, and while they may seemingly appear innocent at first glance; it is their innocence that human nature longs for. The most important truth that allows this play to still live is the honesty of these characters in that they love each other in the way real families do…flaws and all.

So please come on in and visit with the Days, Clare is really a wonderful host.

Rip Claassen
Director

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KARL BITTNER (Clarence Day, Jr.) was most recently seen as Tenorio in the Keegan Theatre’s production of Man of La Mancha. Prior to that he appeared as Prince Charming in Fairy Tale Town Meeting (Joshua Rich, dir.). Karl is a recent graduate of the National Conservatory of Dramatic Arts and Actors’ Repertory Theatre where he appeared in Twelfth Night (Malvolio/Antonio), The Real Inspector Hound (Simon), Buried Child (Vince), and the premiere of Thirteen Beers and a Powerbar (Duke). On film, Karl was featured in The Hunt for Lincoln’s Assassin on the National Geographic Channel and can be seen as Dennis Wilson in an upcoming documentary of Charles Mason.

SCOTT CLARK (Harlan Day) got the acting bug after enjoying lead roles in his local elementary school plays. Since then, Scott has performed in Henry V and A Midsummer Night’s Dream through the Shakespeare Theatre. Scott has also worked professionally in two feature length films as an extra and has done acting and voiceover work in local corporate films. The role of Harlan in Life with Father is Scott’s first professional theatre experience.

K. CLAYTON (Dr. Humphries) was most recently seen as Louie in the Fringe Festival’s Bear Beach. Prior to that he was in Biloxi Blues as Sgt. Toomey (W.A.T.C.H. award Best Supporting Actor) and in Taking Leave as Elliot I (Best Overall Production Ruby Griffith, 2007). Clayton has been involved with many theaters in the Metropolitan area, on stage and off.

BRIAN CRANE (Rev. Lloyd) last appeared at The American Century Theater as Woodyl in Happy Birthday, Wanda June. Other roles at TACT include the Producer in Hello, Dolly, the Egg of Head in MacBird!, Harris in Tea and Sympathy, and Felix/Williams in Paradise Lost. Roles at Washington Shakespeare Company include War in Peace, LeGruie in Red Noses, Lepidus in Caligula, Lodowick in Edward III, and DeNizza and Manco in The Royal Hunt of the Sun. Brian has also appeared as Clotaldo in Life’s a Dream with Journeymen Theater. Brian has been an understudy for several Studio Theatre productions: Man (u/s) in The Long Christmas Ride Home and Teddy Lloyd/Gordon Lowther (u/s) in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie as well as Ralph (u/s) in Frozen for Studio Theatre Secondstage.

DEBORAH RINN CRITZER (Vinnie Day) appeared most recently as Mildred, the martiniguzzling ghost, in TACT’s production of Happy Birthday, Wanda June. Also in TACT: Hello, Dolly; audience hit and The Autumn Garden (Constance Tuckerman). Other recent credits include: Will You Know It’s Me?’ (Margery), Herakles (Mrs. Hoadley) and An Evening with Dave Brubeck at Constitution Hall. Deborah got her start in musical theater in 1985 under the musical direction of Tony Award nominee Michael John LaChiusa. Deborah can be seen in Journeymen Theater Ensemble’s spring 2009 production of Tartuffe (Madame Pernelle).

JOE CRONIN (Clarence Day, Sr.) worked for many years in New York with the Heritage Theatre, among other companies, in such productions as Richard II, All’s Well That Ends Well, Noel Coward’s Hands Across the Sea, George Kelly’s Philip Goes Forth and as Andrew Wyke in the modern suspense classic Sleuth. In the Washington area, Joe has performed with Arena Stage, Theater J, the National Players, Olney Theatre, Rep Stage, Interact Theatre, Everyman Theatre, Washington Shakespeare Company, Washington Stage Guild, Keegan Theatre, Spooky Action Theater and Solas Nua. At The American Century Theater, where he performs frequently, he has played such roles as Looseleaf in Happy Birthday, Wanda June, MacBird in MacBird!, Gus in Paradise Lost, Nick in The Time of Your Life, and the Prospector in Dear World. Joe has an MFA in acting from the Catholic University of America.

MEGAN GRAVES (Mary Skinner) is making her first appearance with TACT. Recent roles include Cecily Cardew in The Importance of Being Earnest, Red in vs. the Wolf (both at Vpstart Crow), Peggy in Father of the Bride, Belle in A Christmas Carol, Cindy in To Gillian on Her 37th Birthday, Mrs. Bennett in Pride and Prejudice, and Jo March in Little Women: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy.

LEXI HADDAD (Maggie) is making her debut with The American Century Theater. Regional credits include Cat on A Hot Tin Roof (The Kennedy Center), The Changeling (The Kennedy Center), The Nutcracker with The Kirov and The American Ballet Theatre Companies (The Kennedy Center), Fidelio, with Placido Domingo (The Washington National Opera), Queen of Spades (The Washington National Opera). Favorite roles include Jojo (Seussical), Lucy (You’re A Good Man Charlie Brown), Little Mary (The Women) and Aggie (Kind Lady). Lexi has been featured in National and Regional Films, Commercial, and PSA’s. She has studied at The Shakespeare Theatre, The Studio Theatre, Synetic/Classika Theatre and The Theatre Lab.

PAUL HOGAN (Whitney Day) is an 8th grader at Kilmer Middle School in Fairfax County. He has appeared as Jack in Into the Woods with the Vienna Youth Players. Previously he played a schoolyard bully in the historical drama The Gray Ghost with the Gray Ghost Theatre Company, and a Pickpocket in Oliver!

SARAH HOLT (Cora) recently completed understudying and went on as Mistress Quickly in Henry IV Part 1 at the Folger Theatre, where last Spring she understudied three roles for The School for Scandal (going on as Mrs. Candour). This summer, she appeared in Dr. Serenity Hawkfie’s Beyond Being Workshop at the D.C. Fringe Festival, which won Best Comedy. She won a Best Performance Award from the Little Theatre of Alexandria for her portrayal of Margaret Lord in The Philadelphia Story directed by Steven Scott Mazzola, and was awarded Best Actress as Norma in The Value of Names at the Virginia Theater Association’s one-act competition. Other local credits include Emilia in Othello and Sister Angelita in Pengu in Blues at the Theatre Lab. Sarah performs, coaches, and teaches improv around the area, including classes at the Little Theatre of Alexandria and workshops at the Actors’ Center. She is a 2006 graduate of the Theatre Lab’s Honors Conservatory.

KAREN LANGE (Margaret) was most recently seen in Washington Improv Theater’s POTUS Among Us and iMusical: Secret Lives of the Presidents. Prior to that, she appeared as Martha in Unintended Consequences as part of the DC Fringe Festival. Other recent roles include Bunny in House of Blue Leaves, Jane in Wonder of the World, and Sorel in Hay Fever. Karen’s most recent film, The Bad News Bearer, which she co-wrote, won a script award and the Best Picture prize at the DC 48-Hour film festival in 2008. In January 2009, Karen will finish a two year intensive training program at Studio Theater. She teaches improvisation and musical improvisation at Washington Improv Theater.

BILLY PUSCHEL (John Day) was last seen as Tommy in Father of the Bride and as John Smith’s sidekick in John Smith: A History of McLean and Great Falls, part of the Jamestown 400th anniversary celebration. Other favorite roles include Benjamin in Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, Rusty Charlie in Guys and Dolls, Winthrop in The Music Man and the title role in Oliver!. He has also appeared in Twelfth Night, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Fiddler on the Roof and Seussical. Billy has studied at the Shakespeare Theatre Company and the Fairfax Academy for the Arts. He plans to major in theatre in college next year.

LAURA ROCKLYN (Delia) was most recently seen as The Girl in Classika Theatre’s production of A Classical Fool. Other area credits include The Bacchae (Autonome) with The Rebellious Players for The Capitol Fringe Festival, Asprio (Reaper) with The Deviated Theatre, The Pirates of Penzance (Daughter) with The Washington Savoyards, The Taming of the Shrew (Bianca) with Olney Theatre Center’s National Players, The Merchant of Venice (Jessica) with Vpstart Crow, Cigarettes and Moby Dick (Lila) with The Venus Theatre, and Perfect Pie (Young Patsy) with The Potomac Theatre Project. Training includes a BA in Theatre from Middlebury College and a Shakespeare Certificate from The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in London.

SHELBY SOURS (Annie) is new to TACT, but you may have seen her around town in various productions, most recently back in the habit as Mother Abbess in The Sound of Music at Way Off Broadway Dinner Theatre. She also had the honor of originating the role of the Reaper, in Deviated Theatre’s innovative world premiere, Asprio, in July and October of 2008. Other credits include Kennedy Center (VSA Arts), Signature Theatre (Forum), Maryland Shakespeare Festival (2 Gents), Washington Improv Theater (iMusical), Venus Theatre (A Little Rebellion Now, Lysistratan), Phoenix Theatre (Lulu Fabulous), Classika–Synetic (The Little Mermaid) and Adventure Theatre (Molly’s Pilgrim, Paddington Bear). Shelby holds a BFA in Music Theatre from Illinois Wesleyan University.
TAMRA TESTERMAN (Nora) has appeared in Independent Films including her role as Officer Jimenez in *Winter Wheat* and the storyteller in the documentary *A Prayer for Nima* filmed in Ghana, West Africa. She received her actor training at The Studio Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, The National Conservatory for Dramatic Arts and Keith Waters.

SETH VAUGHN (Dr. Somers) is thrilled to be making his TACT debut. He last appeared in *Dr. Serenity Hawkfire’s Beyond Being Workshop*, which best comedy at the 2006 Capital Fringe Festival. His other DC credits include Mike Connor in *The Philadelphia Story* (Steven Scott Mazzola, dir.) and Richard Rich in *A Man for All Seasons*. Selected New York credits include Tybalt in *Romeo and Juliet* with Theatre Three, Philip in *The Lion in Winter*, Ross in *Visiting Mr. Green*, Dennis in *Loot*, and *The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* with Arena Players.

**PRODUCTION STAFF**

**SHERRI HADDAD (Producer)** is making her debut with The American Century Theater. She has produced numerous shows within the DC Theatre Community. She serves on several theatre committees around town. Favorite shows include *The Wiz*, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

**RIP CLAASSEN (Director)** has been a local fixture in the Washington theatre scene for many years. Most know him as the Dramaturge at Backstage Inc., Washington’s theatre supply store. Rip has taught theatre and acting at The Institute for the Arts for Fairfax County public schools, Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and several other local theatre programs. Rip has costumed for the American Century Theater and numerous other professional theatre companies, and has directed for National Theatricals, as well as several other local venues. Rip founded the Northern Virginia Theatre Festival for high schools, and provides coaching to theatre students seeking admission to competitive college theatre programs, Governor’s School, roles in community and professional theatres and other competitive programs. He serves as the Artistic Director of Teens and Theatre Company, a non-profit educational theatre company. He has recently worked on productions at Howard and America Universities. Next on his schedule is producing *Native Son* for TACT.

**TIFFANY FORD (Assistant Director)** is making her debut with TACT. Prior to moving to the DC area, Tiffany worked with Walt Disney World in Orlando, FL while attending the University of Central Florida Conservatory, where she founded UCF’s first student production organization. Her directing credits include *After the Fall*, *My Gina, Red! Red! Red!* and several one acts, including two student written shows for the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (region IV, and nationally). Since moving to the area, Tiffany has also stage managed, assistant directed, and choreographed many shows, including Madcap Player’s *Winter Carnival of New Works and Local Story*, Landless Theatre Company’s *Debbie Does Dallas, The Musical*, and *Diamond Dead*, as well as Art Stream’s Improvisation Inclusion Company for Adults. She will be directing *Get Smart* for MVCCT in February 2009.

**DAVID OLMSTED (Stage Manager)** is a graduate of Duke Ellington School of the Arts theater program in Washington D.C. David has been involved in theater for over fifteen years, on stage and behind the scenes, and has performed in Washington D.C. and Massachusetts.

**MICHAEL NULL (Technical Director)** has been involved with TACT for the past year. During that time he has held Stage Manager, Sound Designer, and Technical Director roles. He is very happy to continue working with TACT.

**TRENA WEISS-NULL (Set Designer)** has designed and built the set for TACT’s productions of *Dr. Cook’s Garden*, *The Titans*, *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*, and *Cops*. She works as a director, designer, and theatre teacher in professional, community, and educational venues and has a Bachelor’s degree in Acting-Directing, and Master’s degrees in both Theatre and Education. She is currently directing and doing set design for *The Rimers of Eldritch* at the award-winning George C. Marshall High School Theatre Department where she is the Theatre director as well as designing and building *Life with Father* at TACT. She is a member of the Theatre History Initiative through the Shakespeare Theatre Company and NEH and participated in a “Teaching Shakespeare” Institute through the Folger and NEH in June.

**BILL GORDON (Sound Designer)** a former radio reporter, anchor, and producer, Bill designed sound for many professional productions in Richmond, VA, during the 1990s, including shows at the Firehouse Theatre Project, of which he was a founding member and former President. He served as the Sound Designer for TACT’s production of *The Titans*, and will doing the same for TACT’s upcoming production of *An American Century Christmas*. As an actor, Bill has appeared on the TACT stage as Major Sigfried Von Konigswald in *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* and as The Cabbie and Lt. Buchevski in *Cops*. He also appeared in Spooky Action Theatre’s production of *The Marriage of Bette and Boo.*


**JEN DURHAM (Make-up and Hair Designer)** is delighted to be working on *Life With Father*, her first “adventure” with The American Century Theater. Her most recent theatre involvements include hair and makeup design for *The Wiz* (SMC), hair design for *Sweet Smell of Success* (TAP), and hair and makeup design for *Saturday, Sunday, Monday* (LTA).

**CECI ALBERT (Costume and Properties Designer)** is thrilled to be working on *Life With Father* which has always been a favorite movie. Ceci is particularly pleased to be working again with Susan Sedgewick and Margaret Mook – adding Kate Dorrell and Brooke Purinton to the team makes it even more fun. Ceci has been working costumes and props with the St. Mark’s Players for 6 seasons and co-designed costumes for productions of *M Butterfly*, *the Wiz*, and *A Little Night Music*. Last year, Ceci designed props for Saturday, Sunday, Monday costumes for *Joseph and the Technicolor Dream Coat*.

**KATE DORRELL (Props Assistant)** is debuting as a Properties Assistant with TACT. She previously stage managed for Senior Moments Theatre Company during DC Fringe.
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Sunday – Monday 10 – 6
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Saturday 8 – 6