



A HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD – SEVEN SHORT PLAYS ABOUT A FAMILY

By Philip Middleton Williams

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A House by the Side of the Road
Seven Short Plays About a Family

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PRODUCTION NOTE:

These plays can be done separately or as a full-length production. If they are presented all at once, they should be done in the order listed above as they are in chronological order. Also, it is feasible that the same actors play the same roles through the series.

A House by the Side of the Road

CHARACTERS:

ANNOUNCER: Baseball play-by-play on the radio.

CLYDE: Late thirties.

STEVE: His son, fourteen.

DAN: His son, twelve.

PLACE and TIME:

The back yard and back porch of a suburban home in northwest Ohio. A summer evening not too long ago.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

The voice of ANNOUNCER over the radio in this play is based on that of Ernie Harwell, the legendary play-by-play announcer for the Detroit Tigers. There are recordings of Mr. Harwell through sources such as YouTube and should be used as reference material for the actual voice in the play.

The scene is the back yard and back porch of a house in northwest Ohio. There is a fence along the back wall with shrubs along it and trees off stage indicated by lighting and shadow. Stage Left is the back porch of the house with comfortable patio furniture on it with a table and a radio.

At rise, it is evening; twilight is settling in over the yard, but it is not dark. There are sounds of summer insects – crickets, cicadas, katydids – in the background. There are blinks of light from the lightning bugs in the shrubs. The radio is on and we hear the voice of the play-by-play ANNOUNCER for the Detroit Tigers coming from the radio. CLYDE, a man in his late thirties in shorts and a t-shirt, is sitting in one of the chairs, drinking a beer and listening to the game.

ANNOUNCER: Bottom of the eighth, Tigers with a one-run lead, one man on, two out, and the count to Kaline is three and two. The pitcher kicks and deals....

(Sound of a bat hitting a ball and the crowd cheers.)

ANNOUNCER: And that one is looooooong gone! Al Kaline with a two-run homer and the Tigers take the lead three to one!

CLYDE: Yes! Go Tigers!

(STEVE, followed by DAN, enter Stage Right. STEVE is fourteen, tall, well-built for his age, wearing a Detroit Tigers cap and t-shirt over shorts and sneakers. He is carrying a baseball bat and much-used baseball mitt with a ball in it. DAN is twelve, thin, not athletic, also wearing a Tigers cap but wearing just a plain t-shirt over jeans and sneakers. He is carrying a baseball mitt that looks comparatively new.)

CLYDE: So, how'd it go?

STEVE: We won by a run.

CLYDE: That's good. A win's a win.

(The boys come up to the porch. STEVE sits in a chair, DAN sits on the porch steps, takes off his cap, slouches.)

CLYDE (*cont'd*): How'd you boys do?

STEVE: Three hits. One steal.

CLYDE: That's great. Dan?

DAN: Two walks.

STEVE: And he struck out three times.

(DAN turns and glares at STEVE, who smirks back.)

CLYDE: Well, at least you tried.

STEVE: He didn't even swing half the time. He stood there like a house by the side of the road.

DAN: Well, thank you, Ernie Harwell. (*Beat.*) They looked like balls to me.

STEVE: They were in the zone.

DAN: Oh, now you're the umpire?

STEVE: They were called strikes!

CLYDE: Boys, simmer down.

(CLYDE goes over to DAN, playfully tousles his hair, which DAN barely tolerates.)

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: At least you still won. And you had fun, right?

DAN: Yeah, I guess.

STEVE: Dad, I've been telling you, he can't hit the ball. He just –

CLYDE: So, let's help him. Give him some practice. C'mon, let's go. It's still light out.

(CLYDE goes out into the yard. The boys don't move.)

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Aw, c'mon, guys. Steve, toss me the ball.

(STEVE tosses the ball to CLYDE, then reluctantly gets out of the chair and goes out to the yard. DAN doesn't move.)

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Dan....?

(DAN gets up from the porch and joins CLYDE and STEVE.)

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Good. Okay, Dan, take the bat. Let's see your stance.

(DAN assumes a batting stance, somewhat tentatively, but gets it right. CLYDE nods his approval.)

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Good. Okay, Steve, you be the catcher and I'll be Sandy Koufax.

STEVE: Dad!

CLYDE: Okay, Denny McClain.

STEVE: At least.

(CLYDE moves far enough away to be able to throw the ball underhand and give DAN a chance to swing at it. STEVE takes up his position as catcher.)

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Good. *(Imitating the play-by-play announcer.)* McClain kicks and deals...

(CLYDE pitches underhand; the ball sails past DAN who watches it go by. STEVE catches it.)

CLYDE *(cont'd)*: Okay, good eye, good eye; that one was low and away. Don't swing at every pitch.

(STEVE snorts derisively, DAN glares at him. STEVE tosses the ball back to CLYDE.)

CLYDE: Okay, let's try it again. Get the bat off your shoulder; lean into the pitch.

STEVE: Yeah, if he hits you at least you get on base for once.

DAN: Shut up.

CLYDE: C'mon, guys. Okay, here we go. (*Announcer voice.*) The count is one and oh. McClain checks the sign... the wind-up... the pitch....

(*CLYDE pitches again. This time the ball goes past DAN in the strike zone, but DAN does not move.*)

STEVE: Steee-rike! That one was right in there, Dad.

(*STEVE tosses the ball back to CLYDE.*)

CLYDE (*getting frustrated but trying not to show it*): All right, Dan, just one more.

(*CLYDE pitches, and DAN swings at it, but misses. STEVE catches it.*)

STEVE: See, I told you, Dad. He's no good at it.

DAN: I can do it!

STEVE: Three strikes 'n' yer out!

DAN: The first one was a ball!

STEVE (*mocking*): The first one was a ball!

DAN (*furious*): Oh, fu... Bite me!

STEVE: You'd like that, wouldn't you? Wuss.

DAN: Hey, at least I'm not sitting on my ass in summer school taking Algebra One for the third time.

STEVE: Oh, yeah?

DAN: Great comeback. What's the square root of fourteen?

STEVE: Who gives a shit?

DAN: Thought so.

CLYDE: Both of you! Knock it off.

(*CLYDE goes back up to the porch, the boys following, resuming their previous positions. CLYDE takes a sip from his beer. He turns up the radio.*)

ANNOUNCER: ... The wind-up... the pitch... (*Sound of bat on ball.*) Killebrew pops it foul into the stands. That one was caught by a man from Walled Lake.

STEVE: How does he know that?

CLYDE: Know what?

STEVE: That it was caught by some guy from Walled Lake.

CLYDE (*chuckling*): He doesn't. He just does that to make it fun.

STEVE: I guess he's gotta do something to make it interesting. I mean, it's radio.

CLYDE: That's right.

STEVE: I mean, you can't see it, so... I'd rather watch it.

CLYDE: But that's what makes it so good. You imagine it. You create it in your head.

STEVE: I'd rather be out there on the field.

DAN: I'd rather listen to it.

STEVE: Yeah, that's because you're a little –

CLYDE (*cutting STEVE off*): Ernie Harwell didn't play. He never set foot on the diamond as a player. But he's the best play-by-play announcer in the business.

DAN: Neither did Vin Scully, the play-by-play guy for the Dodgers.

CLYDE: Or Red Barber.

STEVE: Huh?

CLYDE: Sometimes being there takes away from it. I was about Dan's age when I saw my first major league game. Up 'til then I'd just listen to it on the radio.

DAN: Where'd you go?

CLYDE (*reminiscing*): Your grandpa took me to Tiger Stadium on the corner of Michigan and Trumbull. It was my twelfth birthday. We got seats on the second level behind home plate. They were playing the Yankees. But there was so much going on – vendors selling hot dogs and beer – (*Imitating hawkers.*) Programs! Git yer programs! Cold beer here! – and so many other things like the guys selling pennants, and the crowd noise... and there wasn't any play-by-play; just some voice on the P.A. – now batting, number six, Al Kaline – that it was hard to actually watch the game. We were so far away from the field that you could barely see their faces. (*Beat.*) Some of the best games I ever saw were sitting on the back porch. The sun going down, the lightning bugs coming out, the sound of the crickets, the smell of the grass coming up from the lawn... and every now and then there was static on the radio because somewhere between here and Detroit there was a thunderstorm with lightning.

(*Silence as they listen to the crowd noise from the radio along with the background of the crickets.*)

CLYDE: You don't have to play the game to be in it.

(CLYDE finishes his beer, gets up from his chair.)

CLYDE: Time for another. You boys want a Coke?

DAN: Sure, Dad, thanks.

CLYDE: I'll see if there's any popcorn left.

(CLYDE exits Stage Left into the house.)

STEVE: Three point seven-four.

DAN: Huh?

STEVE: The square root of fourteen is three point seven-four.

DAN: So, you're not just a big ole dumb jock after all.

STEVE: Well, better than being a little –

CLYDE *(off)*: Boys, knock it off.

(CLYDE re-enters with Cokes, a beer, and carrying a bowl of popcorn. He hands out the soda to the boys and sits, passing around the popcorn.)

CLYDE: Let's just listen to the game, all right?

STEVE: Okay.

DAN: Yeah, okay.

CLYDE: And remember.

STEVE: Remember what?

CLYDE: Just... listen.

(They listen.)

ANNOUNCER: You're listening to Tiger baseball on WJR Detroit, seven-sixty on your radio dial. We'll be right back with more baseball after these messages.

END OF PLAY.