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*Dramatic Publishing*



# **It's a Wonderful Life**

Adapted for the stage by

**JAMES W. RODGERS**

Based on the film by

**FRANK CAPRA**

*It's a Wonderful Life* is based on the story  
*The Greatest Gift* by

**PHILIP VAN DOREN STERN**

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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©MCMXCIV by JAMES W. RODGERS

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*IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE* was first presented at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington, Kentucky, on December 15, 1993. It was produced and directed by Trish Clark with Set Design by Karl Anderson, Lighting Design by Jeff Fightmaster, and Costume Design by Marie Henderson. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

George Bailey	<i>Bob Martin</i>
Clarence Odbody	<i>John Tackett</i>
Mr. Gower	<i>Spencer Christensen</i>
Young George	<i>Thad Watson</i>
Harry Bailey	<i>Carter Adler</i>
Mother Bailey	<i>Kelly McHone</i>
Aunt Tilly	<i>Stephanie Mills</i>
Violet Peterson	<i>Berry Seelbach</i>
Bert	<i>George Spellman</i>
Ernie	<i>Kris Singeton</i>
Uncle Billy	<i>Sean Zehnder</i>
Mary Hatch	<i>Kelli Stinnett</i>
Henry F. Potter	<i>Langston Hemenway</i>
Mr. Potter's Goon	<i>Shawn Jacob</i>
Mr. Potter's Secretary	<i>Stacey Carpenter</i>
Mrs. Hatch	<i>Sara Feagan</i>
Sam Wainwright	<i>Daniel Melcher</i>
Miss Andrews	<i>Sara Fegan</i>
Mrs. Thompson	<i>Taylor Baker</i>
Mr. Martini	<i>Tony Manuel</i>
Mrs. Martini	<i>Sybil Dawahare</i>
Miss Carter	<i>Garrett Graddy</i>
Newspaper Boy	<i>Thad Watson</i>
Pete Bailey	<i>Thad Watson</i>
Tommy Bailey	<i>Brad Metzger</i>
Zuzu Bailey	<i>Ashley Metzger</i>
Mr. Welch	<i>Joe Mike Anderson</i>
Janie Bailey	<i>Krista Metzger</i>

# IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A Play In Two Acts

For 12 Men, 10 Women, 2-4 young boys and 2 young girls

## CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

GEORGE BAILEY ..... the Everyman of Bedford Falls  
CLARENCE ODBODY ..... A-S-2 (Angel Second Class)  
MR. GOWER ..... proprietor of the corner drug store  
YOUNG GEORGE ..... age 12  
HARRY BAILEY ..... George's younger brother  
MOTHER BAILEY ... a very kind and understanding woman  
AUNT TILLY ..... Uncle Billy's wife  
VIOLET PETERSON ..... proprietor of a beauty salon  
BERT ..... a patrolman  
ERNIE ..... a mail carrier  
UNCLE BILLY ..... George's uncle and business partner  
MARY HATCH (later Mary Bailey) ... George's loving wife  
HENRY F. POTTER ..... owns practically the entire town  
MR. POTTER'S GOON ..... ever-present with Mr. Potter  
MR. POTTER'S SECRETARY ... ever-faithful to Mr. Potter  
MRS. HATCH ..... Mary's mother  
SAM WAINWRIGHT ... a financially successful young man  
MISS ANDREWS ..... a townsperson  
MRS. THOMPSON ..... a townsperson  
MR. MARTINI ..... proprietor of a bar  
MRS. MARTINI ..... his wife  
MISS CARTER ..... a bank examiner  
NEWSPAPER BOY ..... age 10  
PETE BAILEY ..... age 12

**TOMMY BAILEY** .....age 10  
**ZUZU BAILEY** .....age 7  
**MR. WELCH** ..... the schoolteacher's husband  
**JANIE BAILEY** .....age 9

Doubling possible for: Young George and Pete Bailey  
Tommy Bailey and Newsboy

Other doubling possible, if necessary.

Note: It is strongly recommended that your production be staged on a unit set with minimal set pieces and carefully planned costume changes. It is most important that the actors be able to move from scene to scene without blackouts or pauses of any kind.

**SETTING:** Christmas Eve, Bedford Falls. 1945

**TIME:** Early evening.

## ACT ONE

*SCENE: A dark and cold Christmas Eve, early evening on a bridge or near the edge of a cliff just outside the city limits of Bedford Falls. The gray cast of the lights and the sound of the wind suggest that it is snowing.*

*AT RISE: GEORGE BAILEY walks into the area. He is obviously depressed. What should appear as if out of nowhere, steps an angelic, little old man, CLARENCE. He calls out just as GEORGE is about to fling himself off into the water.*

CLARENCE. I wouldn't do it if I were you.

GEORGE. Wouldn't do what?

CLARENCE. What you were thinking of doing.

GEORGE. How do you know what I was thinking?

CLARENCE. Oh, we make it our business to know lots of things.

GEORGE. Look, whatever you're selling, I'm not interested. Please, just leave me alone?

CLARENCE. No, you don't understand. I've got a job to do here.

GEORGE. I said, leave me alone.

CLARENCE *(moving away from GEORGE and glancing up to Heaven)*. This isn't going very well. *(Responding to someone above that we can neither see nor hear.)* Well, you said this was going to be easy. *(Pause for the unseen*



*and unheard voice from above.*) But he won't listen. (*Another beat.*) I know, I know. If at first you don't succeed...blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. (*Gathers his thoughts for a moment, then moves back to GEORGE.*) Have you ever read *Tom Sawyer*?

GEORGE. What?

CLARENCE. Now there was an industrious young man, and when the chips were down, he never gave up. You remember why?

GEORGE. Who cares?

CLARENCE. He kept thinking about others, George. Not about himself but about all the folks who needed him.

GEORGE. You called me George. How do you know my name?

CLARENCE. Oh, I know all about you. I've watched you grow up from a little boy.

GEORGE. How could you? I've never seen you before.

CLARENCE. You haven't needed to 'til now. How's the lip? Looks like it's stopped bleeding.

GEORGE (*sarcastically*). That's the answer I got to a prayer a little bit ago.

CLARENCE. Oh, no—no—no, George, I'm the answer to your prayer.

GEORGE. Who are you?

CLARENCE. Clarence Odbody, A-S-2.

GEORGE. Odbody...A-S-2. What's that A-S-2?

CLARENCE. Angel, Second Class.

GEORGE. Now I know I've lost my mind.

CLARENCE. Not yet. But you were well on your way. That's why they sent me down. Besides, it's ridiculous to think of killing yourself for a measly eight thousand dollars.

GEORGE. How did you know that?

CLARENCE. I've been trying to tell you. I'm your guardian angel. I know everything about you.

GEORGE. Well you look like the kind of angel I'd get, I'll give you that much. Sort of a...fallen angel. What happened to your wings?

CLARENCE. I haven't won my wings yet. That's why I'm an Angel, Second Class. But you're going to change all that.

GEORGE. I am. How?

CLARENCE. By letting me help you.

GEORGE. Only way you can help me is to get me eight thousand bucks before the clock strikes twelve. After that my life turns into a pumpkin.

CLARENCE. Sorry, but we don't use money in Heaven.

GEORGE. That's right. I keep forgetting. Well, down here you can't live without it. And if the truth be known, I'm worth a lot more dead than alive.

CLARENCE. Now look, I told you, you mustn't talk like that. I won't get my wings with that attitude. Besides, you don't realize how much you are worth. Why, if it hadn't been for you...

GEORGE. If it hadn't been for me, everybody I know would be a lot better off. Everybody. My wife, my kids, my friends.

CLARENCE. You sure have got plenty of friends, I'll say that for you. Why, do you know they've jammed up our air waves for over an hour now.

GEORGE. What are you talking about?

CLARENCE. Prayers. When they're heartfelt, they're mighty powerful missiles. And the ones for you...why, they've lit up our whole celestial system.

GEORGE. Why? How?

CLARENCE. Because you're such an important influence in so many lives, George. Always have been. Just like Tom Sawyer.

GEORGE. Since when?

CLARENCE. Ever since that day you saved your little brother from drowning when he fell through the ice.

GEORGE. That was instinct. Besides, I was only twelve.

CLARENCE. There were other boys there that day, some of them older and better swimmers. They didn't nod to their instincts. Only you did.

GEORGE. He was my brother.

CLARENCE. I know. But what about Mr. Gower when you saved *him* from ruin. That wasn't instinct. That was courage. Deep-seated and wrenched-full-of-guts courage.

GEORGE. But he had just received a telegram telling him his son had died.

CLARENCE. And he had turned mean through and through from drowning his sorrow in a bottle. Remember?

*(Lights fade down but not out on GEORGE and CLARENCE. On the other side of the stage the lights come up on MR. GOWER. He is holding his hand over the mouthpiece of a candlestick phone and calling out. He is obviously quite drunk.)*

GOWER. George! Are you out there? *(Into phone.)* I'm sorry, Mrs. Blaine, that medicine should have been there an hour ago. I promise you, it'll be over in five minutes. *(Hangs up the phone and turns to YOUNG GEORGE.)* Where's Mrs. Blaine's box of capsules? Why didn't you deliver them?

*(During the conversation, YOUNG GEORGE has entered and stands next to MR. GOWER.)*

YOUNG GEORGE. I couldn't. (*MR. GOWER grabs him by the shirt and begins hitting him about the head with his open hands. YOUNG GEORGE tries to protect himself as best he can.*)

GOWER. Why couldn't you deliver them? What kind of tricks are you playing, young man? Don't you know the Blaine boy's very sick?

YOUNG GEORGE. You're hurting my sore ear, Mr. Gower.

GOWER (*hitting him again*). You lazy loafer!

YOUNG GEORGE. Mr. Gower, you don't know what you're doing. You put something wrong in those capsules.

GOWER. What are you talking about?

YOUNG GEORGE. I know you're unhappy. You got that telegram today and it upset you. I understand that. But you put something bad in those capsules. I'm sure you did.

GOWER. How do you mean?

YOUNG GEORGE. Just look and see for yourself. (*He pulls out a box of capsules.*) I tried to tell you when you were filling the order but you wouldn't listen. But look at the bottle you took the powder from. It's not right. I swear it isn't. (*MR. GOWER grabs the box of capsules out of YOUNG GEORGE's hand, shakes the powder out of one of the capsules, and cautiously tastes it.*)

GOWER. Oh no...no...no...

YOUNG GEORGE. Don't hurt my ear again! (*MR. GOWER falls to his knees in front of him, holds him fast and begins sobbing.*) I won't tell anyone, Mr. Gower, I promise. I know what you're feeling. I won't ever tell a soul. Hope to die, I won't.

GOWER. Oh, George.

*(The lights fade on YOUNG GEORGE and MR. GOWER and come back up full on CLARENCE and GEORGE on the bridge.)*

CLARENCE. And you never did. Not to this day. That's remarkable.

GEORGE. He's always cared about young people. Gave lots of us our first job.

CLARENCE. Well, he never stopped caring about you, that's for sure. Remember that handsome suitcase he bought you when you thought you were finally heading off for college?

GEORGE. That was a thousand years ago.

*(Lights fade up on MR. GOWER, MOTHER BAILEY, HARRY, AUNT TILLY and UNCLE BILLY, BERT and ERNIE, and VIOLET PETERSON. MR. GOWER is holding a new suitcase and they are all singing "For he's a jolly good fellow..." GEORGE walks into the picture. CLARENCE observes the scene until it is established and then exits offstage.)*

GOWER. May you always use it in good health, George.

GEORGE. How can I thank you, Mr. Gower?

GOWER. By graduating with honors. That would make us all very proud.

HARRY. Fat chance.

GEORGE. Lay you a bet, little brother.

HARRY. Haven't got time. I'm off to my dance. How do I look?

GEORGE. Like a goon in a penguin suit. Where's the funeral?

MOTHER BAILEY. That's enough, you two. You look very nice, Harry.

GEORGE. Of course he does. It's my tux.

HARRY. And what's *your* verdict, Aunt Tilly? Do I look good enough to eat?

AUNT TILLY. If you lay a hand on me, young man, I'll hit you with this purse.

HARRY. Aunt Tilly, I'm in love with you and there's a full moon out tonight. (*She screams and hides behind UNCLE BILLY.*)

MOTHER BAILEY. Harry, that's enough.

HARRY. Hey, Mom, got to borrow the car. I have to take over a lot of plates and stuff.

MOTHER BAILEY. Whose plates?

HARRY. I'm chairman of the eats committee, Mom, and we're short a couple of dozen plates. (*He starts off.*)

MOTHER BAILEY (*following him out*). Now, wait a minute, Harry, you can't use my Sunday china. It was your grandmother's and her mother's before that. Are you listening to me?

VIOLET. We are all going to miss you, George.

GEORGE. Thank you, Violet.

UNCLE BILLY. Say, that's some dress you've got on there.

VIOLET. This old thing! Why, it's just a hand-me-down, like Harry's.

UNCLE BILLY. Well, it sure is pretty, isn't it, George?

GEORGE. What? Oh, the dress. Yes, it's real nice, Violet.

VIOLET. Well, I guess I better be going. The dance starts in another half hour. Why don't you drop by later on.

GEORGE. Just might do that.

VIOLET. Hope you do. Good-bye, now.

BERT. Want Ernie and me to walk you over to the school?

VIOLET. That won't be necessary. Take care, George. (*She exits.*)

GEORGE. Yeah. You too, Violet.

BERT. Well, come on, Ernie.

ERNIE. See you around, George. (*ERNIE and BERT exit.*)

GEORGE (*turning to UNCLE BILLY*). Say, Uncle Billy, where's Pop?

UNCLE BILLY. Had to finish up a special report for Potter. The board meeting's tomorrow.

GEORGE. I thought when Pop put him on the Board of Directors, he'd ease up on us. What's eating that old money-grabbing buzzard anyway?

AUNT TILLY. Oh, he's a sick man, George. Sick in his mind, sick in his soul, if he has one. Hates everybody who has anything that he can't have. Hates us mostly, I'm afraid.

UNCLE BILLY. After you graduate, you wouldn't consider coming back to the Building and Loan with us, would you, George?

GEORGE. Not me, Uncle Billy. I couldn't face being cooped up for the rest of my life in a shabby little office. I'm sorry, but the thought of spending all my life trying to figure out how to save three cents on a length of pipe...I'd go crazy. I want to do something big, something important.

UNCLE BILLY. Well, you know, George, I think your dad and I feel that in a small way we are doing something important. It's deep in the soul of a man to want to own his own roof and walls and a fireplace to sit beside of an evening, and we'd like to feel that we're helping him get those things.

AUNT TILLY. But, Bill, you've got to admit that this town is no place for any man unless he's willing to crawl to Potter. Now, you've got talent, George. We've all seen it. So, you go on and get yourself an education and then get out of here if you must.

UNCLE BILLY. Have any idea what you want to do, George?

GEORGE. Sure. I want to build things like skyscrapers, maybe even cities. It's been a dream all my life.

UNCLE BILLY. Still after the first million before you're thirty?

GEORGE. No. I'll settle for half that in cash.

UNCLE BILLY. Well, your Aunt Tilly and I are sure going to miss you.

GEORGE. And I'm going to miss all of you, that's for certain. (*Handing the suitcase to UNCLE BILLY.*) Do you mind taking this into the house? I think I'll walk over to the school and drop in on Harry's dance.

AUNT TILLY. Have a good time, son.

*(Lights cross fade to CLARENCE who has entered unobserved near the end of the previous scene. He stays alone in this sequence. GEORGE is off stage changing costume.)*

CLARENCE. And you did too. Remember? That was the night you met Mary Hatch. Of course, you had known Mary all your life. She grew up three or four years right behind you and was always there, somewhere in the background...tagging along until one of you boys noticed and sent her on her way. But that never discouraged her, not her or any of the girls. They all had their eyes hooked on you—especially Violet and Mary. You just never took the bait until Harry's graduation party. That's when you danced the Charleston all night with Mary Hatch until someone tripped the lock on the moving gym floor and everyone fell—or jumped into the swimming pool.

*(Lights fade on CLARENCE and come up on GEORGE and MARY walking down a residential street. The night is warm with a bright moon. GEORGE is dressed in jersey*



*sweater and oversized football pants that keep wanting to come down. MARY is in an old white bathrobe. Each is carrying their wet clothes tied into a bundle. They enter singing,)*

GEORGE and MARY. "Buffalo gals, can't you come out to-night, can't you come out tonight, can't you come out to-night. Buffalo gals, can't you come out tonight and dance by the light of the moon."

GEORGE. Hot dog! Just like the church choir.

MARY. Beautiful.

GEORGE. You should have seen the commotion in that locker room. I had to knock down three people to get this stuff we're wearing. I bet over half your class jumped in that pool.

MARY. Half the town said it wasn't a good idea to build the gym floor over a swimming pool. I wonder who turned the key.

GEORGE. Probably someone jealous 'cause you chose me to dance with ya.

MARY. You think, maybe?

GEORGE. Here, let me hold that old wet dress of yours. *(He takes the bundle of clothes from MARY. They stop and look at each other.)* Hello.

MARY. Hello. You look at me as if you don't know me.

GEORGE. Well, I don't.

MARY. You've passed me on the street almost every day.

GEORGE. Me?

MARY. Uh-huh.

GEORGE. Uh-uh. That was a little girl named Mary Hatch. That wasn't you.

MARY *(laughing)*. Do I look as funny as you do?

GEORGE. I guess I'm not quite the football type. You...you look wonderful. You know, if it wasn't me talking I'd say you were the prettiest girl in town.

MARY. Well, why don't you say it?

GEORGE. I don't know. Maybe I will say it. How old are you, anyway?

MARY. You can't ask that.

GEORGE. Well, I am.

MARY. Eighteen.

GEORGE. Eighteen! Why, it was only last year you were seventeen.

MARY. Too young or too old?

GEORGE. Oh, no. Just right. Your age fits you. Yes, sir, you look a little older without your clothes on. *(MARY stops. GEORGE, to cover his embarrassment, talks quickly on.)* I mean, without a dress. You look older...I mean, younger. You look just...*(In his confusion GEORGE steps on the end of the belt from MARY's robe, which is trailing along behind her. She gathers the robe around her.)* Oh-oh... sorry.

MARY. Sir, my train, please.

GEORGE. A pox upon me for a clumsy lout. *(He picks up the belt and throws it over her arm.)* Your...your caboose, my lady.

MARY. You may kiss my hand.

GEORGE. Ummmm...*(Holding her hand, GEORGE moves in closer to her.)* Uh...Mary. *(Just as he is about to kiss her, MARY turns away singing.)*

MARY. "As I was lumbering down the street..." *(GEORGE looks after her, then pantomimes picking up a rock from the street.)*

GEORGE. Okay then, I'll throw a rock at the old Granville house.