



ONE ON THE AISLE

Pamela C. Allen

GLADYS IN WONDERLAND

Playwright: Rosemary Frisino
Toohey

If you've ever had to deal with older folks, are sick and tired of being an older folk who is being treated as a child, or plan to become an older folk, this play is for you. This is one of the stronger, better efforts of the Maverick Players.

Gladys lays waste to the myth of the sweet ol' grandmotherly, blue hair type. She is sardonic, crusty, funny and tired of this last act of her life. She is a Mary Lou Cassidy type of character. Ms. Cassidy gives a women like this so much life. She is a fine facial actress. You watch Gladys to see her reactions to the various interruptions in her routine. Gladys may be 81, but she is not ready to "buy the farm, kick the bucket" etc. Not only is Ms. Cassidy playing the title role, but she also directed this production.

Death (Mort) comes to visit her in the form of Michael Fields. This is one of his strongest performances. Mort gives her a choice on how soon she'll leave. Due to various interruptions her stay becomes extended. He hangs around to watch, no one but Gladys can see him. This situation makes for funny scenes.

Dick Prentice plays Dennis, an overeager Meals on Wheels type that is over the top. He delivers a meal, making it sound like SO MUCH FUN. Liver is only that much fun if someone else is eating it. You can understand Gladys' desire to get rid of this person. Even I wanted to get rid of him.

Gladys' family wants to move her to a nursing home, so Gladys and Mort go to visit one. With the help of two cute little old inmates, Lillian and Ethel, played by Donna

Spears and Pat Adams, Gladys learns that "nursing home therapists are kindergarten teachers with bad knees." Judging by the way she is treated by her family, there are a lot of kindergarten teachers in her life.

Betty Kemp plays Doris, Gladys' long suffering daughter. Doris is clearly at her wits end over how to handle her strong-willed mother.

The strongest scene in the piece derives its power from the actresses playing the roles. Shirley Ireland plays Mildred, Gladys' long-time best friend. Mildred is more than a little Emily Litella, the old Gilda Radner character. Ms Cassidy and Ms. Ireland have played in so many productions together that their reactions on stage are real and comfortable for an audience. There is no acting involved, just lines.

The other members of the cast play Gladys' family: Jim Huddleston as Frank, Sue Smith as Myrna, Diane Browne as Karen, and Scott Long as Henry. They treat Gladys in their own well-meaning but wholly insensitive ways. Not all seniors need to be huddled over and treated like babies, not all of them need your ideas on how to spend their time. None of them need to be talked down to. No one in Gladys' family has a clue about how to handle her.

Gladys, like all people, has changed over the years, and she is no longer within their comfort zones. I have a feeling the same holds true of

many families. After Mort shows her how they really feel about her still being alive, he makes "leaving" really her choice.

I found this to be a laugh-out-loud kind of evening with a ring of truth around it. Remember we are ALL this close to being in the same boat. Go see it!

GLADYS IN WONDERLAND plays until Aug. 17 in the new home of the Maverick Players at Midland Park Mall. I have a feeling that word of mouth on this one will fill up the seating charts, so call for your reservations at 522-5225.

Sunday afternoon I saw the final production of PETER PAN at Permian Playhouse. They did get the stage lighting fixed for the time being, but they sacrificed the house lights to do it. The whole light issue will be resolved soon. The audience was almost full, but the cast was having too much fun. Actors who were in control at the beginning of the run, were padding their parts enough to make the production run longer at the end. Consistency, ladies and gentleman. The final audience should be privileged enough to see the same, or better, show as the first audience. I do hope PETER PAN made lots of money for the Playhouse!

Pamela C. Allen, a 17-year member of the Midland Reporter-Telegram staff, has been involved in all aspects of live theater since 1963 from finding props to producing. She can be reached at pa@mrt.com.

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