

Not in Our Town
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SETTING: Billings, Montana
TIME: December 1993
SET: Area staging of different homes in Billings

SYNOPSIS: The tale of the beginnings of the “Not in our Town” movement.

SYNOPSIS: When a brick is thrown through a young boy’s window because of a menorah decal, the boys parents are told to take the decal down to keep their family safe. That doesn’t sit well with the parents and in a short period of time, the townspeople figure out a way to quietly combat “hate.”

RUNNING TIME: 30 minutes

ZOOM POSSIBILITIES: Because the play relies on sound, this play is easily adaptable to Zoom. The visual of hanging the menorahs in windows would be poignant if they occurred at the same time in all the Zoom windows.

OPTIONAL SPECIAL EFFECTS: The sound of crashing glass (heard twice)

OPTIONAL NOTES ON SOUND: Music may be used - peace hymns - as long as it is in Public Domain or permission is granted (separate from the playwright) The cast could sing stanzas or choruses a cappella. Some suggested songs in public domain are:
SWING LOW, SWEET CHARIOT
LET THERE BE PEACE ON EARTH
O COME, O COME EMMANUAL (advent hymn)

NOTE: This is a true story. I have fictionalized the people involved but they are all based on actually people, true events. Even the Skinhead and the short story of his transformation are true.

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Not in Our Town

CAST OF CHARACTERS: 10 (3 female, 2 male, 5 male or female)

SKINHEAD (male) 18-35; a witness

ANNA (f) 15-17; conscientious, receives an unwanted crash course in “hate”

CATHY FEUER (f): 30's; craves justice

DAVID FEUER (m): 30's; (Cathy's husband) needs to protect

MEL (m/f) early 20's: graduate student in Biology, home for the holidays; pragmatic

ALEX (m/f): 15-17 Anna's friend, child of a pastor; craves junk food

MARJORIE (f) 40; Mother of Anna and Mel; believes in social justice; also a worrier

KELLY (m/f); 15-17 gung ho for – anything; likes to stir the pot

LEE (m/f) 15-17 must think things through slowly and carefully

JORDAN (m/f) 15-17; frightened

Not in Our Town

Lights up on the SKINHEAD.

SKINHEAD

Happy Chanukah. Welcome to the Festival of Lights. A menorah. The Star of David. A brick.

(Sound of shattering glass. Lights change to CATHY'S home. ANNA enters.)

ANNA

What was that? *Is anybody there?* (Beat.) You guys! Stay out! I'll be right back - no! Just stay in there! I'm not going anywhere. *Listen to me! Sit in the kitchen away from the window and DON'T MOVE!*

(As ANNA checks out the living room, CATHY enters. ANNA jumps.)

Who's there?

CATHY

Anna - it's me. What's the matter? Where are the kids?

ANNA

Oh Mrs. Feuer! There was - a crash - glass I think -the shattering of glass -

CATHY

What?

ANNA

- I was going to check it out but I didn't want to leave the kids alone. The sound came from upstairs.

CATHY

The kids?

ANNA

They're fine - in the kitchen - I ordered them to stay there.

CATHY

(Exiting.)

Eli! Michael! Anna! Have David search the house. ... I'm sorry, Anna.

(She runs off. ANNA calls to her as DAVID enters.)

ANNA

Mrs. Feuer! There's nothing to be sorry about!

DAVID

What's all this? Who's sorry for what?

ANNA

I think someone broke a window upstairs. I'm not sure but the noise was awfully loud -

DAVID

The kids?

ANNA

Mrs. Feuer's with them -

DAVID

I'll take a look. Are you okay?

ANNA

Yeah. Sure. Nobody's hurt.

DAVID

Thank God. I'll check things out and then run you home. I'm - sorry, Anna.

(DAVID exits.)

ANNA

It's not your fault. Maybe it's nothing.

DAVID (Offstage)

Sleeping bags! Time for sleeping bags! (DAVID appears.) Do you like to camp, Anna?

ANNA

Not really.

DAVID

Cathy never was one for a good old fashioned camp-out. But camping in the bedroom might work. Maybe some hot chocolate. I don't know if we have marshmallows. Eli likes marshmallows. Picture books. I'll see.

ANNA

Mr. Feuer?

DAVID

I need to call the police. Can you stick around a little while? They'll want to speak with you.

ANNA

What - happened?

DAVID

A brick was thrown in to Eli's bedroom - a Chanukah greeting. I would have preferred a more traditional greeting. I can't let him see his room. His bed's - completely covered with shards. So - sleeping bags, I think. Keep the kids out of Eli's room. We'll have a camp-out - make it fun. A Chanukah treat complete with hot chocolate and everything else they're not allowed to have late at night. Police ... Anna - you should call home. Tell them I'll bring you over as soon as I can. I need to see my children.

(DAVID starts to exit to where CATHY and the kids are; he stops and pauses.)

Anna - I'm so sorry.

(DAVID exits)

ANNA

It's ... okay. Really. It's ... not your fault.

(ANNA is utterly helpless and alone on stage. If there are lights, they dim. ANNA goes to the phone to call her parents. She exits with the phone.

If there is sound, we may hear a peace hymn.)
As the lights change we may see a fragmented Star of David.)

(When the lights return, we are in the home of ANNA and MEL. ANNA enters.)

MEL

FINALLY!

ANNA

Where are Mom and Dad?

MEL

Asleep. I'm the one you worried with your call. I'm home for twenty-four hours and I'm already babysitting my little sister.

ANNA

Shut up. I asked you to wake them and tell them what happened.

MEL

No. You told me *not* to, remember? So, I've been all alone here worrying. Next time I will wake them up - it's their job to worry!

ANNA

Sorry. Don't remember what I said.

MEL

Hey - you okay?

ANNA

What do you think?

MEL

I don't want to play twenty questions.

ANNA

The glass - I keep hearing the breaking glass. The shards all over Eli's bed. Because he had a decal of a menorah in his window. Eli's five! How do you explain this to a five-year-old?

MEL

Did you talk to the police?

ANNA

Duh!

MEL

Just making conversation.

ANNA

I know. I'm tired. And I don't think I was very helpful. I was downstairs with the kids. Didn't see a thing. Just heard it. I'm still hearing it.

MEL

Want to - talk?

ANNA

Don't know.

MEL

Want me stay here and not talk?

ANNA

I should go to bed.

MEL
Music to my ears.

ANNA
Except I won't sleep.

MEL
Popcorn?

ANNA
Yeah. And music.

ANNA
I'll fix the popcorn. You'll burn it.

MEL
Which leaves me to find music.

ANNA
Hey, Mel – it's nice – you know. Nice to have you home for the holidays.

MEL
Finally! I'm appreciated!

ANNA
Yeah.

MEL
You're welcome.

(And ANNA goes off to fix some popcorn as MEL exits to find some CD's.)

(Over to the side, the SKINHEAD - holding racist literature – comes forward.)

SKINHEAD
The news travelled fast in my circles. I knew the police would come and take statements. I also knew there was nothing they could do. We work in the dark, in the shadows. We know when to stay invisible. And when to strike.

(LIGHTS up on ANNA'S home. It is the next morning. ANNA is up early holding a plate of Christmas cookies – and eating. MARJORIE enters.)

MARJORIE

Good morning. A little early for a sugar blast, don't you think?

ANNA

They're comforting.

MARJORIE

I won't have any left for Christmas!

ANNA

Then don't bake them until Christmas Eve.

MARJORIE

It was on the radio. The window-breaking incident.

ANNA

What did they say?

MARJORIE

Maybe I shouldn't talk about it. I noticed you were walking the floors last night.

ANNA

Mom! I can't go fly off to Never-Never-Land and pretend it never happened. Besides, this is good right? It's good for people to know what is happening in their town.

MARJORIE

I suppose. I must give that idea a good think.

ANNA

Hmm – you thinking. Could be dangerous.

MARJORIE

You don't know the half of it.

(ANNA and MARJORIE exit. The SKINHEAD comes forward.)

SKINHEAD

“How to throw a brick into a window.” It's a sport. Can you hit it spot-on and shatter the entire window? Bonus points for that. Can you make sure the brick makes it deep into the room? That takes skill. Too many people just dent the house. You'd be surprised at how many bricks don't make it inside the house. But man! What a thing of beauty when it landed where we wanted it. And the noise – the shattering – it proclaimed a job well done. And the funny thing is – even if there are witnesses – nobody talks. Nobody comes forward. Once you scare people, you're home free. Free to keep doing stuff – to someone else.

(We are back at ANNA'S home.
The doorbell rings. ANNA answers. CATHY
enters.)

ANNA

Mrs. Feuer! Is everything all right?

CATHY

We're fine. I just stopped to let you know that we won't be using a babysitter for a while. The kids are at my mother's and we thought it best to just stay home for the time being. But I wanted to give you this.

(She hands ANNA an envelope.)

It's the money you would have earned in December. I thought you could use it for your Christmas shopping.

ANNA

No. I couldn't/

CATHY

/take it. David and I are in agreement about this.

ANNA

But I didn't/

CATHY

/We insist.

ANNA

Thank-you. (Beat.) How are the kids?

CATHY

Confused. All the decals came down. The menorah is hidden from view. Officer Jerrick thought it best. They said they didn't want us "advertising" the fact that we are Jewish right now. I never thought about the menorah as an advertisement. Imagine if every Christian in Billings was asked to hide their Christmas tree.

ANNA

It probably would not go over well.

CATHY

Probably not. But we will put our "Jewishness" into hiding as has been done in the past. (Beat.) I appreciate everything you did to keep the children safe.

ANNA

I care about them.

CATHY

I know. I will keep in touch.

ANNA

I wish there was something I could do to help.

CATHY

The officer thought this would blow over. I don't know. Merry Christmas, Anna.

ANNA

Happy Chanukah, Cathy.

(They hug and CATHY exits. Lights dim on ANNA'S home and the SKINHEAD steps forward.)

SKINHEAD

I didn't decide to "hate." It was a defense mechanism – to protect myself from others. I come from a lineage of proud Klan members. I spent summers at my grandfather's farm going to meetings. It was like a secret club. Whenever "a minority" came on TV, insults were hurled at them and the TV was shut off. Minorities and gays were bringing us down. They were unraveling the fabric of "decent society." Jews had all the money. That's why I couldn't get a job. They were all held by "them." College was for "them." I had no vocation. Education was for "other people." My daddy insisted that I could get all the education I needed at home. He said, "I didn't need no college degree to get where I am." I never occurred to me to notice that where he was – was nowhere.

(We return to ANNA'S home. MEL is up, reading a newspaper. ANNA'S friend ALEX has joined them.)

ANNA

We're going downtown to do some Christmas shopping. Want to come?

MEL

No money. I'm in college, remember?

ALEX

We don't do any actual shopping. It's mainly an excuse to grab some junk food and look at windows.

MEL

Don't they feed you at home?

ALEX

Wholesome grains and vegetables. My diet needs more sugar. Come on, it'll be fun.

MEL

Still must decline. I have a project due right after New Year's. Schools like to make sure we are miserable over Christmas break and load us down with work.

ANNA

Keeps you honest.

MEL

Keeps me overwhelmed.

ALEX

Christmas will do that. Right now my dad is going over and over his Christmas sermon to make sure it is equal parts inspiring, sticking to scripture and not boring the congregation who just want to go home and open presents.

ANNA

The perils of being a minister. I wonder if he knows about the Feuers.

MEL

He must. It's in the paper. In the police blotter, anyway.

“A brick was thrown through the window of a home on Danville Place. No injuries were reported. Police say it may be a hate crime. There are currently no suspects. If anyone has seen anything suspicious, they are asked to contact their local police department.”

ANNA

“*May*” be a hate crime? I think when the police tell you to remove the Menorah from your home and decals celebrating Chanukah, you can safely say it was a hate crime.

MEL

Did they do that?

ANNA

Mrs. Feuer came by this morning and she said the police suggested they take down all signs of Chanukah. What a message that tells their young sons.

ALEX

As we celebrate the birth of a little boy, there are people trying to harm little boys. But who am I to judge? I probably play it safe all the time.

ANNA

What does that mean?

ALEX

Just that sometimes when I hear something – something I know is wrong, I just keep my mouth shut, you know. Don't want to make waves. I'll change the subject or walk away.

ANNA

We all do that.

ALEX

I don't know how to stop. I'm not really pushy.

ANNA

And I don't like to make waves. You know, the "don't get involved" mentality.

ALEX

Guilty.

ANNA

I told Mrs. Feuer that I wished there was something I could do. It's kind of a meaningless statement. Wishing and doing are two very different things. I'm a wisher.

ALEX

Guilty again.

ANNA

So how do you make the leap? How do you go from a "wisher" to a "doer?"

ALEX

Uhh ... "do" something?

ANNA

Like what?

ALEX

Like I have no idea. You're the one making the switch,

MEL

You two will drive me insane! You're both Sunday school teachers, right? Start there.

ALEX

Where?

MEL

In the classroom!

ANNA

You know that could be a good start. Alex, do you think your dad has time to talk to me?

ALEX

Pick up junk food on the way?

ANNA

Absolutely.

MEL

I'm in.

ANNA

But – you have work.

MEL

It will be too quiet here. And if you are going to figure out how to make some noise, I want to be part of it.

(ANNA, MEL and ALEX exit as the SKINHEAD comes forward.)

SKINHEAD

Silence. We counted on it. It protected us for years. Nobody knew what to do. Nobody knew what to say. So nobody said anything. The hate literature -

(Holding up a flyer.)

- had been going around for a year. We'd hire kids to put them on windshields or nail them on poles. I know. I started papering people's cars with – this – from the time I was ten. If a police officer caught me, I would proclaim my innocence and say I was helping a random adult. I always claimed I didn't know what any of it meant. And I'd be sent on my way with a stern, "Don't ever do this again."

It was amazing to be part of an operation that was so covert. I thought I had found my place among these people – these people who welcomed me in a way that I had never been welcomed before. We were untouchable. Unreachable. We worked under everyone's radar. I won't lie. It was a thrill.

(Lights up at ANNA'S home.

There's a meeting of sorts. ANNA is there with friends: ALEX, KELLY, LEE and JORDAN. MEL is also present as is MARJORIE. There's an excitement in the air. It's noisy. ALEX is by the food or sitting with a bowl of candy/cookies/chips

in his arms. CATHY and DAVID are there.)

ANNA (to MARJORIE)

You don't have to stay.

MARJORIE

Last time I checked, I was the parent. With your father hiding in his room, someone needs to keep all of you focused. Shall we get started?

ANNA

What do I do?

MARJORIE

Begin. This meeting is your idea.

ANNA

What was I thinking? (Beat. Then without much conviction...) Hello everyone! *Everyone? **Hello out there!*** We're going to get started.

(People move closer.)

I'd like to introduce you to Cathy and David Feuer – the couple I babysit for. They were the ones attacked by the brick.

CATHY

Actually, the brick was meant for Eli. Eli is five years old. I understand that you all teach a Sunday school class and Anna thought maybe you could incorporate the story of Chanukah into your lesson side-by-side with what happened to us. It's a worthy attempt and David and I support what you are trying to do.

DAVID

I think what's important is that we do not "want to go gentle into that good night." I don't have an answer but getting the word out – letting Billings know what is happening in our town is a start. It's ironic. Chanukah is the Festival of Lights. The one time of the year where we light the way for others. Right now my menorah is tucked away in my mother's home. All over town, Christmas trees are lit but the menorah is dark.

KELLY

I'm ready. Give me something to do. It beats all this talking.

CATHY

I think – that's for you to decide. What you want to do and how far you will go to do it. What we're asking of you is tough – we're asking for you to find a way where we can light our menorah.

DAVID

We'll leave the rest up to you. We have to pick up the kids. I appreciate Anna and Marjorie letting us have our say. We'll let ourselves out.

(DAVID and CATHY exit. There is quiet.)

JORDAN

What did Mrs. Feuer mean when she said, "how far we will go to do something."

LEE

How much of your safety will you give up to do something?

JORDAN

Wait! Can we get hurt?

ANNA

A five year-old had his window shattered! It's a miracle he wasn't hurt.

JORDAN

But – he wasn't. Isn't that the point?

LEE

No. The point is - he could have been.

JORDAN

But he wasn't!

KELLY

Can we move on from this conversation that does nothing. What can we do? I mean we could teach Chanukah. I guess little kids could color in a menorah or something. I don't know what my junior high school students could do.

ALEX

Teach songs? Learn a prayer? Make latkes?

LEE

Latkes?

ALEX

Potato pancakes fried in hot oil – so good!

MARJORIE (Raising her hand)

Mom here! Hot oil and little kids are not a good mix. Continue.

LEE

I don't know if we want to just do a class on the meaning of the holiday or learn finger plays and stuff like that. I think we want to impact the community – do something that wakes them up.

MEL

Like – what?

LEE

I have no idea.

MEL

Maybe we need the idea first.

LEE

Hold on! Can we brainstorm this before we dismiss it?

MEL

Not dismissing it. But what you said is vague.

MARJORIE

Anna! Get them back on track.

ANNA

Hey guys! Get back on track. (Aside.) Was that good?

(MARJORIE flashes her the A-ok sign.)

KELLY

We need to shake things up. Lee is right. Coloring and singing won't do that.

MEL

So, do you have an idea?

KELLY

Actually – I do. But Alex's dad will have to go along with it. What if – instead of using this as a lesson for Sunday school – we did something really meaningful. What if we inserted a picture of a menorah into every church bulletin? And asked the parishioners to hang them up in their windows?

JORDAN

No! There are kids involved. Someone could get hurt.

ANNA

The Feuer's have kids.

MARJORIE

And last I looked – you all are kids.

JORDAN

But no one got hurt. Suppose we do this and someone gets hurt.

LEE

I like the idea.

JORDAN

I don't. Can we vote?

MARJORIE

As a mother – I hate the idea. As someone who has tried to teach social justice her entire life, I have to admit it has clout. It's putting your money where your mouth is.

JORDAN

It's scary.

MARJORIE

That it is and we need to recognize that fact. How can we do this and guarantee safety?

KELLY

We can't. That's the point. We are making ourselves as vulnerable as the Feuers are.

JORDAN

But we're not Jewish!

KELLY

What does that mean?

JORDAN

You're asking us to be a target when we're not a target!

KELLY

We are putting ourselves in their shoes!

ANNA

Stop it! We're Sunday school teachers and we sound like a bunch of alley cats hissing and swiping at each other. Nothing's getting done!

MEL

(With a swipe.) Meow!

ANNA

You're not helping.

LEE

Okay Boss-lady. Where do we go from here.

ANNA

First. I like the suggestion of putting a copy of the menorah in the Sunday bulleting.

(JORDAN reacts.)

But – and this is very important - I think it needs to be optional. So that if you are vulnerable – or terrified – we don't make anyone a social outcast because of their fears. Because the reality is – windows will get broken. These people don't play around. But they're cowards. They do everything in the dark. If they were proud of their actions, they'd proclaim it from the rooftops. This is a way of proclaiming our beliefs from the rooftops.

MEL

Or from windows.

ANNA

Thank-you, Peanut Gallery for your clarification. Imagine – if hundreds go up on the windows Sunday night... what a statement that would send.

ALEX

And guys, it could be a moot point. I don't know if dad will go along with it. It's kind of last minute. He's not exactly impulsive.

MARJORIE

I don't know – I have a feeling he will. All right – everyone – it's getting late. Grab some cookies and bars – stuff your pockets. I don't need all this junk around/

ANNA

/We need some of it!

MARJORIE

Take most of it! Let's figure out carpools. I'm driving some of you and Mel is driving who's ever left. I'm taking Alex. I want to talk to Pastor Johnson.

ANNA

Me, first. Let me speak with him first. Deal?

MARJORIE

Deal.

The lights fade to black as the SKINHEAD comes forward. Church bells peal.

SKINHEAD

I went to church. The bells were singing, "Peace on earth, good will to men." And I left – with a photocopy of the menorah hastily stuck in the church bulletin. I understood the sentiment involved. I knew the expectations. I also knew that even if a hundred menorahs went up, one brick would scare them away.

(We see a montage of the cast – some of them putting up a menorah in the window. Everyone is holding a photocopy of the menorah. Some make the decision to hang them up. Some make the decision not to. A hymn may be heard. MARJORIE is just staring at her menorah. ANNA enters.)

ANNA

Aren't you going to put it up?

MARJORIE

Anna! Don't just come into a room suddenly! You startled me.

ANNA

You're spooked.

MARJORIE

A little. I was thinking of how you keep hearing the sound of shattered glass – and now – if I put this up – it may happen to us. Are you sure you are all right with this?

ANNA

No. But I want it up. If not downstairs, maybe in my bedroom window.

MARJORIE

No! The living room window. Right next to the Christmas tree. And nobody is to sit near the window! (Beat.) Goodness. Now I know exactly how the Feurs feel. And I don't like it.

(We switch to the SKINHEAD.)

SKINHEAD

I knew the police would be kept busy.

(Sounds of shattering glass and sirens.)

About ten homes were hit and a lot of cars. People, who were afraid to display the menorah in their homes, taped them into their car windows.

