

# FAMILY VALUES

BY DAVID WILLIAMSON



**CURRENCY PRESS**

The performing arts publisher

**GRIFFIN  
THEATRE  
COMPANY**

## CURRENT THEATRE SERIES

First published in 2020

by Currency Press Pty Ltd,

PO Box 2287, Strawberry Hills, NSW, 2012, Australia

enquiries@currency.com.au

www.currency.com.au

in association with Griffin Theatre Company

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Typeset by Dean Nottle for Currency Press.

Printed by Finline Print + Copy Services, Revesby, NSW.

Cover image shows Andrew McFarlane. Cover photograph by Brett Boardman.

Cover design by Alphabet Studios.



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

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FAMILY VALUES 1

*Theatre Program at the end of the playtext*

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*For Kristen, who has been the inspiration for my strongest,  
most engaging female characters for many decades.*

*Family Values* was first produced by Griffin Theatre Company at SBW Stables Theatre, Darlington, on 17 January 2020, with the following cast:

SUE	Belinda Giblin
LISA	Danielle King
ROGER	Andrew McFarlane
MICHAEL	Jamie Oxenbould
EMILY	Ella Prince
NOELINE	Bishanyia Vincent
SABA	Sabryna Walters

Director, Lee Lewis

Dramaturg, Van Badham

Designer, Sophie Fletcher

Lighting Designer, Benjamin Brockman

Composer and Sound Designer, Steve Francis

Stage Manager, Khym Scott

## **CHARACTERS**

ROGER COLLINS, 70, retired judge

SUE, his wife

LISA, 42, their daughter

MICHAEL, their son

EMILY, their daughter

NOELINE, Emily's partner

SABA NAZARI, 27, Iranian

## **SETTING**

Roger and Sue's living room.

ROGER, 70, stands alone by a dining room table already laid out with drinks and snacks for an imminent gathering. He's trying to tie the neck of a coloured balloon to prevent the air from escaping. His fingers are not as nimble as they used to be so he's finding it difficult. So far he has only managed to tie the necks of two balloons which rest on the table. A pile of uninflated balloons lie waiting.

SUE enters from the kitchen and watches his inept efforts. She can't stand it any longer and steps up and starts to blow up and tie the other balloons much more efficiently. ROGER is relieved and starts to tie the inflated balloons together on a piece of string.

ROGER: Stupid idea.

SUE: You wanted it.

ROGER: No. Not the birthday gathering. The balloons.

SUE: They were your idea too.

ROGER: I thought it would bring back fond memories of *their* parties. But all I can remember is shouting and chaos.

SUE: You used to head straight for your office.

ROGER: You were better with discipline.

SUE: I had to be, didn't I? Your idea of discipline was to clear your throat and frown.

ROGER: Are you sure I fathered them?

SUE *stares at him.*

It was the seventies. [*He shrugs.*] How can they possibly share the same gene pool? Michael and Lisa? And Emily?

SUE: What's wrong with Emily?

ROGER: Suddenly for no apparent reason she turns her whole life around.

Are *you* happy with her new partner?

SUE: A little too forceful for my liking.

ROGER: I meant ... gender.

SUE: It was a surprise but I'm getting used to it.

ROGER: I'm damned if I am. And to make it worse her name's Noeline.

SUE: What's wrong with Noeline?

ROGER: Every Noeline I've ever met has been ... strident. And this one's no exception.

SUE: Try and be nice to her.

ROGER: [*staring at SUE in horror*] She's not coming? I thought you were supposed to make sure—

SUE: She insisted.

ROGER: On what grounds?

SUE: She's made it clear to Emily that if they're going to marry she expects to be accepted as one of the family.

ROGER: I don't want her as part of the family.

SUE: Short of murder, it's about to happen. For God's sake, don't tell her how you voted.

ROGER: She knows.

SUE: How?

ROGER: Emily asked me if I was voting yes. I told her I may be old-fashioned but I still believe marriage should be between a man and a woman.

SUE: The yes vote does still allow that to happen.

ROGER: How do all those trendy 'yes' voters feel now as their wives leave them and marry women.

SUE: [*incredulous*] What?

ROGER: It's happening. I read it.

SUE: Where? Miranda Devine?

ROGER: Some of what she says makes sense.

SUE: That's grounds for divorce.

ROGER: Emily's marriage was perfectly fine. What was wrong with Neville?

SUE: He's the only anaesthetist in Sydney who doesn't need drugs to put his patients to sleep.

ROGER: Okay, Neville can drone on a bit, but to dump him for a pit bull like Noeline? I just don't get the attraction?

SUE: Apparently Neville never worked out his penis wasn't just for urination.

ROGER: Sex? It's about sex?

SUE: When you haven't had it for six years it's a plausible reason.

ROGER: She likes it better with ... Noeline?

SUE: She says unlike your average man, women know what to do with each other.

ROGER: So I guess you're about to leave me for that chiropodist of yours.

SUE: She's made an approach and I'm considering it.



ROGER *stares at her*.

That was what's called a 'joke'.

ROGER: I know what a joke is.

SUE: You've never made one, so I didn't like to assume.

ROGER: Don't you worry about little Phoebe and Josh? Their mother out on the ocean most of the year? We get to see them more than she does.

SUE: They seem happy with Neville.

ROGER: All children deserve to have a father and a mother.

SUE: Ours only got a mother.

ROGER: That's rubbish!

SUE: Ask them. Their most frequent memory is a closed office door which they knew they couldn't enter because [*in a hushed tone*] 'Daddy is working on a judgement'.

ROGER: The court was overloaded.

SUE: Lisa's teacher told her all judgements came from heaven. She thought you were God.

ROGER: That didn't last long.

SUE: Don't try and deny I did the lion's share of bring them up.

ROGER: My workload—

SUE: I had a punishing workload too. As a social worker you have to manage human distress at the coalface, not juggle legal abstractions.

ROGER: I was earning a lot more than you. Laying the financial foundation for the life we lead now.

SUE: The life we lead now includes three children who grew up thinking they weren't important enough to warrant your attention.

ROGER: So how come I was the one they came to when you wouldn't listen to them?

SUE: They knew I wouldn't indulge them.

ROGER: I indulged them?

SUE: You were a soft touch.

ROGER: You were too tough on them sometimes.

SUE: I had eight hours a day of people with real problems. I wasn't going to put up with petty whinges.

ROGER: They weren't always petty whinges.

SUE: When you did finally emerge to do a bit of fathering, you patted them on the head and told them they were wonderful, totally undermining my efforts to edge them towards maturity.

ROGER: Happy birthday Roger.

SUE: Sorry. You triggered a few old resentments.

ROGER: Is there some way I can avoid triggering any more?

SUE: [*with a sigh*] You're a dear thing most of the time—

ROGER: I have some good qualities?

SUE: You're kind, you're generous, but some gremlin snap-froze your social attitudes sometime around 1959.

ROGER: Is there something wrong with being a social conservative?

SUE: Yes. It condemns everyone who's not powerful, white, heterosexual and male to feel they haven't got a voice.

ROGER: Turn on Radio National and all you hear are minority groups shrieking their grievances.

SUE: Thank God. Every other voice we hear is a paid lackey of Murdoch!

ROGER: You can browbeat me as much as you like but I don't like the fact that Emily is marrying a woman!

SUE: Well, it's happening, so when she arrives with Noeline, try and be a little gracious!

*LISA, 42, enters with SABA, 27. She has overheard what her mother has just said.*

LISA: Noeline is coming?!

ROGER: Yes, she thinks of herself as one of the family.

LISA: We can't stay.

ROGER: You've just arrived.

LISA: Noeline's the captain of a Border Force cutter.

SUE: So?

LISA: Dad, Mum, this is Daniela. We're in a bit of an emergency situation. We're on the run.

SUE: On the run?

*LISA takes out her iPhone and sends a quick text message.*

LISA: Border Force are hunting for her.

ROGER: Border Force?

LISA: Killcare. I need the keys. We need it for a couple of weeks.

SUE: What's going on?

SABA: I was brought here under the medevac laws.

LISA: And she's fled community detention.

ROGER: Why?

LISA: Gary Duckett is hell bent on sending her back to Nauru.

ROGER: But by fleeing you're just making matters worse.

*SABA starts to try and explain, but LISA cuts her off*

LISA: Dad, she's just had two psychiatric assessments saying she's at high risk of suicide if she was ever sent back to Nauru.

SUE: Then why is Duckett doing it?

LISA: He hates the fact that any refugees got here under the medevac laws. The prick!

ROGER: I wish you wouldn't use language like that about a democratically elected Minister of the Crown—

LISA: You think you're still living in a democracy?

ROGER: Of course we are. A democracy protected by the rule of law.

LISA: Yeah. Sixty-two new security laws in the last ten years.

ROGER: Lawfully enacted by an elected parliament.

SUE: Every one of them designed to curtail our freedom to act and speak.

ROGER: Enacted to respond to a worsening security situation.

SUE: Journalists raided because they were gutsy enough to tell us about appalling behaviour we've got an absolute right to know about! Is that what should happen in a democracy?

ROGER: Susan, I don't think it's fruitful at this moment to enter into this debate. [*To LISA*] All I want to know is why are you involved?

LISA: We were alerted when Daniela escaped and I've been assigned to hide her.

ROGER: We? Who's we?

LISA: You don't need to know.

SUE: If you're wanting to hide her in our holiday house, perhaps we do.

LISA: You don't need to know.

ROGER: Do you realise the consequences of what you're doing?

LISA: Yes.

SUE: What's happening to Daniela sounds awful, but did you have to do this on your father's birthday?

LISA: I'm the only one in my group without any known links to her that Border Force can trace.

SABA: I'm sorry to disrupt this special occasion, Justice Collins. I really am.

LISA: Call him Mr Collins. He's retired.

ROGER: Most people still accord me the respect of Justice.

- LISA: Dad, this is scarcely the situation for formalities.
- SABA: I'm happy to call your father Justice Collins.
- SUE: Don't you dare. He's retired. He can learn to be human again.
- LISA: Dad, I need the keys to Killcare.
- ROGER: Hasn't anyone told you harbouring an illegal resident is a criminal offence?
- LISA: Ten years jail or a fine of 180,000 dollars or both, but what our government is doing is nothing short of barbarous.
- SABA: I can't go back there, Justice Collins.
- ROGER: I understand your distress, Daniela, but I can't possibly be party to a serious offence.
- LISA: I'm committing the offence.
- ROGER: I give you those keys and I'm aiding and abetting it.
- SUE: She can say she had a copy of the key. Nobody will know.
- ROGER: I'll know, and if I'm questioned I won't perjure myself. [*To SABA*] Surely it can't be that bad on Nauru. You're housed, you're fed, you're free to travel anywhere on the island. Gary Duckett said you're all buying Armani jeans.
- SABA: [*indicating her jeans*] I wish. Target. Twelve dollars.
- LISA: Dad, you can't possibly believe anything Gary Duckett says!
- ROGER: I know he's the object of derision as far as you inner-city, latte-sipping, deep green—
- SUE: Roger, please don't keep stereotyping your daughter as a latte-sipping—
- ROGER: And she doesn't stereotype me?
- SUE: You deserve it.
- LISA: As do all the other aging Anglo males desperately clinging on to the power and privileges they've unfairly appropriated.
- ROGER: You're trying to tell me you haven't been privileged? Educated at huge expense at a school where you walk in the gates and encounter such manicured arboreal perfection that you half expect a heavenly choir to pop out from behind the privet hedge and welcome you to the afterlife?
- LISA: I got privileges I didn't deserve—
- ROGER: So you've now devoted your life to making sure nobody else does.
- LISA: Dad, I need the Killcare keys.
- SUE: Give her the keys, Roger.