

Winner of the 2003 New Noises Playwriting Award

and

a 2004 Palm Springs International Playwrights Festival Finalist

A Place at Forest Lawn

A New Play About Old Friends

by

Luke Yankee & James Bontempo

A Heartwarming Drama in Two Acts
based upon a one-act play
by Lorees Yerby

“At a Hollywood Rest Home, a cantankerous old lady struggles to make peace with her estranged son and protect her devoted best friend from a shameful truth she’s kept hidden for decades – but discovers she’s not the only one with a stunning secret.”

Like DRIVING MISS DAISY and THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL before it, A PLACE AT FOREST LAWN surprises with humor, comforts with insight, and charms with intriguing characters. These six compelling roles have attracted the talents of Betty White, Marion Ross, Pat Carroll, Barbara Rush, Frances Sternhagen, Marian Seldes, Millicent Martin, John Glover, Steven Culp, Marcia Cross, George Grizzard and Tony Goldwyn, all of whom have starred in SRO staged readings from coast to coast.

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At a wake for a fellow resident of their Hollywood rest home, elderly, independent **CLARA** Olsen sharply criticizes the service to **GERTRUDE** Wynant, her kind-hearted best friend since childhood, and **ALBERT**, a grand gentleman from a bygone era. The feisty senior even scolds the new priest **FR. GABRIEL** (30s) for his unorthodox methods. Clara had planned to mail yet another unanswered letter to her son, but rips it up in frustration. In Seattle, when humorless businessman **JACK** Olsen (40s) gets a \$75,000 mausoleum bill, he thinks his mother has died. But arriving at the rest home he's shocked to find Clara *alive* -- and she's equally surprised to see *him* after two decades.

The tension is thick between them, though Jack's pleased to see "Aunt" Gertrude again. But they're interrupted by philosophical stoner **SONNY** (30s), the Rest Home's driver, who challenges a reluctant Jack to stay for a few days to make peace. Mother and son try to talk but resentment reigns. When alone, Clara is comforted by donning a man's sweater monogrammed "HW" and seeks advice from beyond: Jack's here now, but she needs strength to deal with him – something is troubling her.

Gertrude volunteers at the hospital and falls in love with a fragile baby in a high-risk ward. She lovingly cradles the tiny infant, telling a warm tale of her marriage to the late Henry Wynant. Meanwhile, Jack grills Clara about bills for medical tests, but she's evasive. When he sees the monogram on the sweater, he viciously confronts her about once finding her in the arms of Gertrude's husband years ago. When Clara confesses that she loved Henry and *not* Jack's father, her explanation drives Jack out. He needs a drink so he joins Albert's poker game with Sonny and Fr. Gabriel, where humorous confessions last deep into the night. The next morning, Gertrude takes Clara to visit her beloved infant. They sing and reminisce, when the ailing baby suddenly dies in Gertrude's arms. Shattered, she breaks down in silent sobs. Clara can only hold her grieving friend.

ACT II: Clara tries to console Gertrude, who finally reveals a shocking truth: she's always known Henry and Clara were in love. Gertrude didn't stop them; she didn't want to lose both her loyal husband *and* her beloved friend. Clara desperately wants to make it up to her. Gertrude's only request: to be buried with Clara. Clara agrees, they'll be together in her mausoleum.

Sonny arrives to take Clara to the doctor, and maneuvers a hung-over Jack to drive her himself. The two warily reminisce about his childhood, sharing a laugh, but she doesn't let him see her grab her side in pain. Afterward, Clara secretly calls Sonny to pick her up; she can't face Jack with her news. Sonny shares his "Maui Wowie" weed to ease her pain and Clara gets kite-high – and the munchies! When Jack finds Clara stoned in the Dining Room, he yells at her and she leaves. Alone with Jack, Sonny tells him what Clara couldn't – she's dying, with maybe a month to live.

Uncharacteristically scared and vulnerable, still Clara knows what she must do. She grants Albert his fancifully-false memories; gives Fr. Gabriel a new insight into his flock; makes amends with Jack, and sends him home with a hard-won mutually-understanding good-bye. *And* she cancels the mausoleum – she and Gertrude have chosen a pretty green resting spot instead. Sonny sympathetically brings Clara pain killers, gently warning that it's easy to OD on the lethal narcotic and to be very careful with the ten he gives her. But when Gertrude discovers what's going on and interrupts Clara's final preparations, the lifelong friends face the hardest – and kindest – of decisions.



The truth can set you free – but at what cost? Friendship is the tie that binds in this bittersweet and candid look at remembered love, forgotten promises, living with choices, and dying with dignity. On a simple unit set where subtle lighting, smart dialogue and dynamic acting deliver emotional revelations, this vibrant play peels back layers to reveal the essential truths of life. For every child and parent, A PLACE AT FOREST LAWN encourages us to simply *be there* for each other, no matter what age.