

"Uncommon Bonds,"

A Civil War Play Written by JoAnn Bowman

Characters:

Andrew Bloom, Detroit, Michigan, Private, 2nd Michigan Infantry, Company A
David Wagner, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Private, 137th Regiment, Pennsylvania Infantry
Jackson Wisher, Charleston, South Carolina, Private, 17th South Carolina, Company C
Sam Billingsley, Waco, Texas Private, 4th Texas, "Lone Star Guards", Company E
Clara Barton, Union nurse
Sarah Emma Edmonds, a.k.a. Private Franklin Thompson, 2nd, Michigan, a.k.a. Bridget O'Shea, peddler spy
Annie Etheridge, Daughter of the 2nd Michigan Regiment, Detroit
Narrator (Can be more than one)

Production Notes:

This play was produced in three areas since we did not have a curtain to close to change scenes. We used a long, rolling room divider and pinned scenery to it.

Scene 1: Starting from the left of the audience, there was a VMI classroom scene. It was December, so there were no leaves on the trees outside and bits of snow were on the window. The VMI logo was visible on the wall.

Scene 2 and 4: The camp scenes can be the same background. We just changed the flag on the pole as needed.

Scene 3: Washington, D.C. was in front of the middle scene. No real background was necessary. We wrapped boxes with paper and string and labeled them. We tore up old sheets and wrapped like bandages. We had some small trunks, and found some wooden crutches at Goodwill. These were stacked up and Clara used a clipboard (period?) to check things off. Two of the boys (without caps) then moved them to the hospital scene in the back.

Scene 5: The hospital scene is made to look as if a house was overtaken by a hospital. We used desks as beds covered by sheets from Goodwill. It was placed in the center because it was the final scene where all cast members came together.

6. We performed this play for parents and the rest of our school who had not studied the Civil War so we needed the introduction. If the audience had knowledge of the war, then the first two questions could be skipped.

7. To add more people to this play, the narrator's part can be divided up into several. Additional soldiers could be added to camp and hospital scenes.

8. Costumes were kept fairly simple. The girls had long skirts and aprons. Sarah changed from a Union uniform to a skirt, straw hat and basket. Annie added a traveling black cloak (a cool Goodwill find) as she was walking to the hospital scene. She removed it as she got to work.

9. The boys wore white, collared shirts. At VMI, they all wore blue pants, then the two Confederates changed pants. They all wore caps purchased from Wilson's Creek National Battlefield store. Adding money to the battlefield's coffers thrilled them and the boys were impressed that the caps came from a real battlefield site. The caps were worth the money spent and the bookstore manager, Joyce, made extra effort to get the caps to us on time.

10. We had ready-made bandages and slings to fit the wearer. We had water pitchers and fresh water. We used red food coloring for Andrew's bandage across his eyes.

Introduction to audience.....

Narrator: What is the name of our country? (United States of America)

What does "United" mean? (Wait for answers..)

(Can start here...)

Narrator: About 150 years ago our country was not united. They were very divided over the issue of slavery. The Southern states want to keep slavery. They said if Abraham Lincoln was elected that they would leave the United States and form their own country.

The Northern States thought no state had the right to leave.

Soon our one nation would be divided into two, countrymen against countrymen, brother against brother. It would take bloodshed and death to reunite it.

The war also brought many people together who might never have met. They formed "Uncommon Bonds".

We begin our story in Lexington, Virginia at the where a group of close friends attend the Virginia Military Institute. It is December of 1860 and Abraham Lincoln has just been elected president.

Scene 1:

December, 1860

Classroom of Virginia Military Institute....Lexington, Virginia

Sam: Oh I'm stuffed. That lunch was delicious. I need another nap.

Jackson: Sam, you are always eating or sleeping.

(rushing into the room)

David: Well, they did it.

All: Did what?

David: South Carolina is leaving the United States and forming a whole new country.

Andrew: (angrily) They can't do that!

David: (shaking his head) A state just can't decide to leave the Union.

Jackson: (defiantly) Oh yes we can, David. My family in Charleston has been talking about this because Lincoln won the election. He's against slavery and we need our slaves to plant and harvest our cotton. The very cotton that is in your shirt.

Andrew: But slavery is wrong!

Sam: That's for the states to decide, Andrew. My family doesn't own slaves, but no one can tell Texans what to do.

(Knock at the door or offstage) Andrew answers, listens, nods head and closes.

Andrew: Jackson, your family has called you home to join the South Carolina Guards. The school says the boys from the North should leave Virginia before Virginia secedes too.

David: Home? I hadn't thought of that. I'm sure my home state of Pennsylvania will fight to keep the states united.

Jackson: I can't wait to get home and whip some Yankees or anyone who tries to stop us.

Sam: I'll stay here and wait for orders from Texas.

Andrew: The next time we meet could be on a battlefield.....on opposite sides...

Jackson: I'm not worried, Andrew. You're not that good of a shot!

Andrew: Hey.....

Jackson: I'm joking. Take care of yourself my friend.

All gather and create a unique handshake. (We created a square) Shout: Hurrah! (All leave going opposite directions)

Scene 2:

Union Training Camp, Detroit, Michigan

Narrator: Not all that answered the call of duty were men. A woman named Sarah Emma Edmonds enlisted as Franklin Thompson and not even her friends knew who she really was.

Twenty women signed on with the 2nd Michigan Regiment to help in anyway they could. Annie Etheridge was one of those women.

It is now May of 1861 and the 2nd Michigan infantry are training for war.

(Sarah and Annie are walking towards each other. They meet and try to pass but keep running into each other.)

Annie: What's your hurry soldier?

Sarah as Franklin: Oh, I'm not in a rush, just deep in thought. There's more to this soldiering than I thought.

Annie: I know what you mean. I thought I would be helping all the boys in uniform and I'm stuck doing mounds and mounds of laundry.

At least my officers will be clean when they go to fight the Rebels.

Sarah as Franklin: You must be one of the daughters of the regiment. I heard about you. My name is Franklin Thompson, at your service. (salutes)

Annie: You don't have to salute me. Just be my friend. Annie is my name, Annie Etheridge.

Sarah as Franklin: It's a pleasure, Miss Etheridge. Well, I am going to be late for duty now. Maybe you will graduate to cooking next week.

Annie: I can only hope. Goodbye, Mr. Thompson.

Scene 3:

A Washington, D.C. warehouse

Narrator: Some women knew nurses would be needed for the war, but generals would not allow them in combat zones, only in the hospitals. That is until Clara Barton came along. Clara worked tirelessly to gather medical supplies and then petition to the commanders to let her bring the supplies where they were needed most....the battlefield.

Clara Barton is in Washington. D.C. packing supply wagons.

(Clara is counting boxes and crossing things off her list).

Clara: Bandages, basins, cloth for cleaning wounds, Where's my box of iodine? Sheets, crutches....

(Talking to herself) I have no right to these easy comfortable days and our poor men suffering and dying thirsting in the hot sun and I, so quiet here, in want of nothing,..My lot is too easy and I am sorry for it.

(To the helpers)

Get these boxes on the wagon. There's so much more to do.

(leaves with her list)

Scene 4:

Confederate camp near Sharpsburg, MD

Narrator: This is a Confederate Camp, on the evening of September 16, 1862.

Soldiers are preparing for battle the next day near a creek called Antietam, near the town of Sharpsburg, Maryland.

(Sam Billingsley is cleaning his gun in front of a fire.

Jackson Wisher walks by and recognizes him from school.)

Jackson: Sam? Sam Billingsley, is that you?

George: Jackson, you ol' sharpshooter. How are you? Have yall seen much action?

Jackson: We just marched up from Boonsboro with General Longstreet today. We need a rest.

Sam: I know what you mean. We were at 2nd Manassas and we battled at South Mountain three days ago. We're all exhausted and hungry most of the time.

Jackson: Same ol' George. Always thinking about food. Hey, Look there's a lady selling things. Maybe she has some food.

Sam to the lady: Do you have anything to eat?

Bridget O'Shea: Sure do. How about a juicy red apple? I picked it 'for the whole Union army stole it. Need any soap?

Sam: No thanks for the soap, but I'll take two apples please ma'am. What's your name?

Bridget: Bridget O'Shea of Sharpsburg. And you?

Sam: I'm Sam Billingsley of Texas, ma'am, at your service. And this is Jackson Wisher, the deadliest shot around.

Bridget: It's nice to meet you both. Are you here with General Longstreet?

Sam: Oh yes, and General Lee is here to attack in the morning.

Bridget: Are you two going to fight the Union yourselves?

Sam: Oh no. There's a ton of us here.

Jackson: Don't tell the whole battle plan, Sam. The Yankee camp isn't that far. You don't know who could be listening.

Bridget: Well I'm off to sell more of my wares. Stay safe fellows.

Sam and Jackson: Thanks. Miss O'Shea.

Scene 5:

Poffenberger Farm, September, 17, 1862

Narrator: The battle started this morning in a cornfield. Antietam Creek is on one side of the fighting and the town of Sharpsburg is on the other.

Clara Barton is tending to both Confederate and Union soldiers who have stumbled into the Poffenberger's farm which has become a make-shift hospital because there are so many wounded.

(Sam Billingsley is already there.)

Clara: Here you go, soldier. Let me take a look at that. (Clara puts a bandage around his arm) This will stop the bleeding until the doctor can see you. I'll get you some water.

Sam: Thanks, ma'am.

(David is on the field off to the side and suddenly gets shot in the arm. Annie is walking nearby and helps David off the field and into the hospital.)

Clara: (To Annie) What are you doing here? (Smiling) I thought I was the only woman around here ...We'll have to stick together. My name is Clara Barton.

Annie: I'm Annie Etheridge with the 2nd Michigan. My commander sent me away from the battle line to help with the wounded. I picked up this soldier on the way.

David: Thank you for your kindness, ma'am.

Annie: (Nods in appreciation to David then answers Clara) I haven't seen nurses on the battlefield before.

Clara: Well, this is the first time I have been allowed. I wasn't scared at all until this morning when I was helping a soldier get a drink. A minie ball went straight through my sleeve and into his heart. He died right in my arms.

Annie: Oh I'm so sorry. I've been with these Michigan boys for over a year and I've had more than my share of close calls.

Clara: Do you know much about nursing?

Annie: I've had to learn. Let's get busy.

(Bridget O'Shea enters)

Bridget: (to Annie) Excuse me, can you tell me where Union headquarters is. I have some important information for General McClellan.

Annie: I think it's over beyond those trees (pointing in the general direction). (Bridget recognizes Annie.)

Bridget: You don't recognize me, do you?

(Annie looks puzzled) It's Franklin Thompson. (She salutes) I met you under piles of laundry.

(A wave of recognition rolls over Annie)

Annie: I never would have guessed. Is this how you sneak into enemy camps? You look amazing!

Bridget: The name's Bridget O'Shea today. Spying is so much more fun than nursing. I have to go deliver this message, Annie, but I'll come back and help if I can.

Annie: The fighting is terrible out there. Stay safe, Franklin, I mean Bridget.... (Bridget leaves.)

(Scene shifts to Andrew and Jackson in the cornfield.) Andrew is hurt in the head and can't see. Jackson has a broken leg. Andrew falls over Jackson. Jackson helps Andrew to his feet and recognizes him.)

Jackson: Andrew, it's me, Jackson.

Andrew: Is it really you? I told you we'd meet on the battlefield one day. I can't see. Are you hurt?

Jackson: I think my leg is broken. Do you think you can help me walk if I tell you where to go? There has to be a field hospital around here.

(They assist each other to the farmhouse.)

(Annie recognizes Andrew as one of "her boys".

Annie: Andrew, you're hurt. (She helps them find places to sit or lie down)

Andrew: I never would have made it here without my buddy Jackson I knew from school.

Jackson: I don't think I could have crawled this way. He saved me.

(David rises up from his bed)

David: Oh my goodness. Look what the cat dragged in.

(Andrew and Jackson look surprised.)

Sam: (joining the group) I'm here too.

(Bridget walks in.)

Bridget: I'm back to help.

Andrew: I can't believe this! (Explaining to Clara, Bridget, and Annie) The last time we were together was at school.

David: We've seen so many of our friends die. I'm so glad we are all alive.

Jackson: This war just seems so senseless now. You are all still my friends no matter what side we are on.

Clara: (To Annie and Bridget) We have to support each other too.

(Ladies join hands though not like a sporting huddle)

All ladies: To friendship!

(Boys help each other up. All gather together and shake like original handshake.....)

All: To friendship! Hurrah!

Sam: But I am still hungry!

Fact and Fiction-

1. The soldiers were actual people from those units and fought at the battle of Antietam/Sharpsburg. Their names were taken from regimental histories and muster rolls.

2. The 4th Texas was at 2nd Manassas, then South Mountain.
3. The 17th South Carolina was at Boonsboro with General Longstreet.
4. The Battle of Antietam was the first battlefield where Clara Barton was allowed to attend. She brought lifesaving supplies to the medics who had been using cornhusks to tend wounds.
5. Sarah Emma Edmonds enlisted as Franklin Thompson in the 2nd Michigan and later made nine forays into Confederate territory using several different disguises. As Bridget O'Shea, she peddled fruit and soap and gathered information.
6. Annie Etheridge was with the 2nd Michigan though it is not known if Sarah and Annie ever met.
7. I learned after this play, that Annie's division may not have been at Antietam, but was possibly in Washington, D.C. at the time. It is important to corroborate facts with several sources!
8. Clara Barton was hit by a minie ball through her sleeve, killing the soldier whom she was helping at Antietam. She never mended the hole.