

LIFE
WITH
FATHER
DAY



Life with FATHER

By CLARENCE DAY

WITH A FOREWORD
BY HOWARD LINDSAY
AND RUSSELL CROUSE

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LIFE WITH FATHER

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FOREWORD

BY HOWARD LINDSAY AND RUSSEL CROUSE



This is not really a foreword. It is a confession and, perhaps, in some small measure, an atonement.

For more than four years people have been congratulating us on the success of a play which has been running all that time at the Empire Theatre in New York and most of that time on "the road"—a week here, a night here, in almost every town and hamlet in the country which still has a theatre not dedicated exclusively to the cinema. The play is *Life with Father*. We have been accepting these congratulations blandly, taking what we hoped would appear to be somewhat modest bows without blinking an eye.

This is just to tell you that we have, in the parlance of the theatre, which is the parlance we parlez best, been stealing these bows. It was only human, perhaps, that we should. But that is no plea. And so now we have our opportunity to make restitution. We return such laurel as we may have worn unbecomingly for the last four years to the brow where it so rightly belongs. The success of *Life with Father*—the book, the play, the legend which

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one day it will surely become—belongs to Clarence Day, Jr.

As you read the pages that follow, and other works of Clarence Day, Jr., you will find that many lines in our play are taken literally and bodily from the little white sheets he so painfully inscribed during his long illness. But that is not important. You will find the robust, if evanescent, spirit of a father and a mother and their family in those pages. That's why his stories gave him immortality. That's why *Life with Father*, the play, is a success. We put the same spirit on the stage.

We can say that with all modesty—and this time genuine modesty—because we can also say with complete frankness, that we do not know how we did it. We were not conscious of the achievement as we wrote the play. It would be nice to say that we believe the benevolent shade of Clarence Day was hovering over us guiding our hands. But that would not be completely honest. For we are just as sure that Clarence Day did not know how he put that spirit in his stories, either.

Clarence Day wrote the story of his family out of his heart. It flowed through his crippled fingers with the ease and grace of truth. He may have been conscious of the fact that he was putting his own family on paper, but he could not have known that he was also capturing for a whole world a little

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something of everybody's family. That, however, is what he was doing.

Of the million Americans who have now seen *Life with Father* on the stage, literally hundreds of them from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Private Brugger have taken time to tell us that at least one fleeting second of it reminded them of someone or something in their lives. The Days lived on Madison Avenue in New York, but these stories of recognition and identification have come to us from every Main Street in the nation.

That is not all. Clarence Day's canvas is not framed by the boundaries of one nation. Shortly after the play opened René Clair, the brilliant French motion-picture director, came to see it. After the play he asked to meet us. His first question was:

"Tell me, how and where did you know my father?"

We assured him we had never met his father. And then for an hour he regaled us with stories of Père Clair which Clarence Day might have written—which, indeed, he did write, except that with Père Clair it was the Sunday *pot au feu* that was made "in a damned barbaric manner" instead of the coffee, and the parade of maids who marched through their turbulent household outside Paris

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were named Marie and Yvette and Jeanne instead of Annie and Norah and Maggie.

We sat at dinner one night beside a Polish woman who demanded even before the soup was served a complete explanation of how we happened to know so much about Polish family life. Three beaming Chinese gentlemen appeared backstage one night to tell us that Father Day was also a part of that ancient sector of civilization. And only last week we had a mellow note from two Norwegian refugees who reported they had seen the play and had felt its nostalgia so deeply that they had gone quietly from the theatre to a bar where they had drunk far too many "Skols" to fond memories.

So it would seem that Clarence Day wrote not of just his father and his mother and his family—but of all fathers and mothers and of all families. To us there is great significance in that fact. For now there is in every heart the burning hope for world understanding from which alone can come a rich and everlasting peace. The universal appeal of the simple saga of Clarence Day's family seems to prove again that the springs of human action transcend the boundaries of geography and race. It is hopeful evidence that in some future day the human race can be a human family.

November 24, 1943

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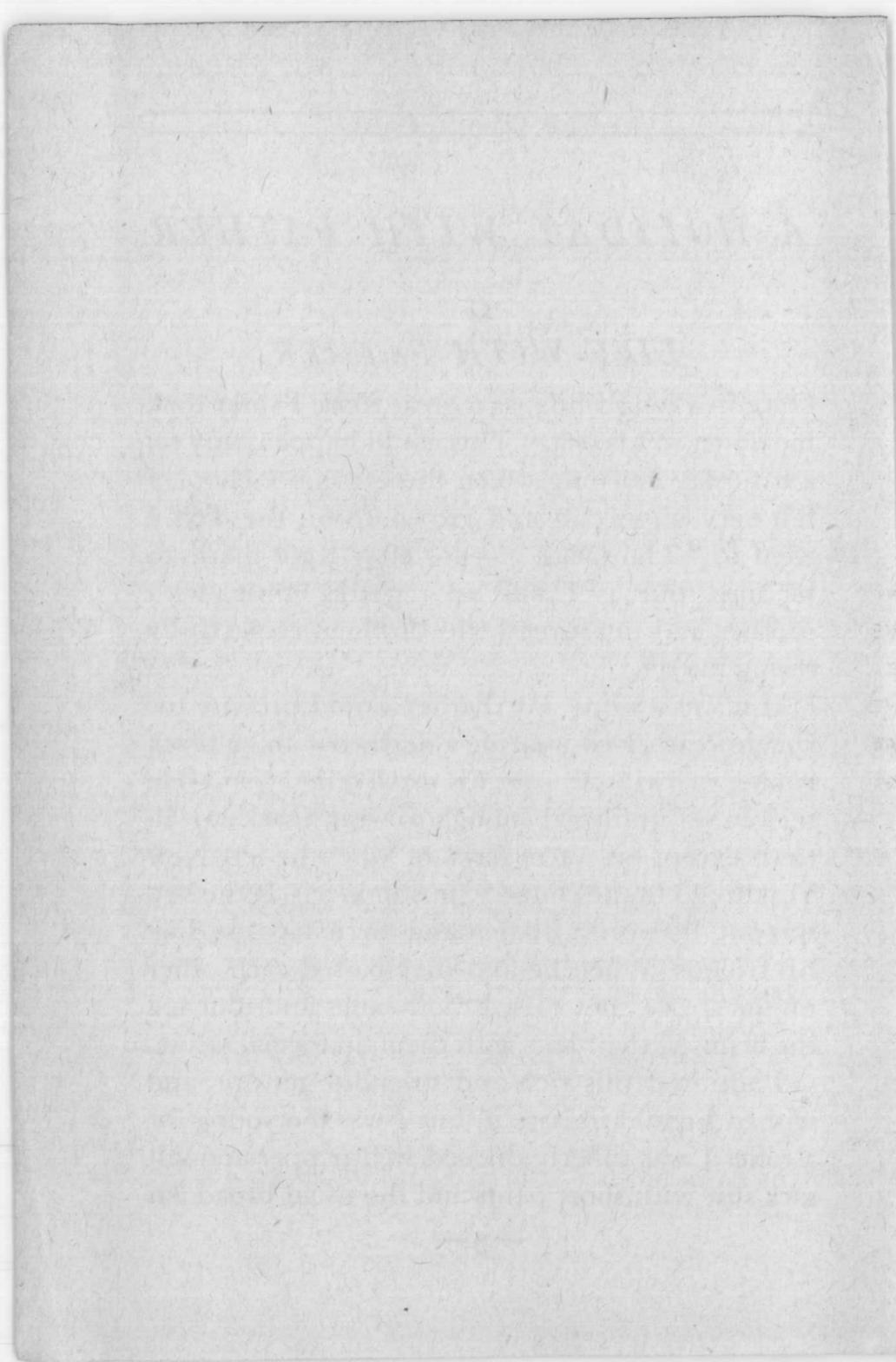


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LIFE WITH FATHER



A HOLIDAY WITH FATHER



Once in a long while, as a great treat, Father took me down to his office. This could happen only on a Saturday morning, when there was no school. I felt very important and grown-up on the days I went to "The Office"—not after I got there, to be sure, but as I was leaving the house, with Mother and my three little brothers respectfully seeing me off.

If it was a rainy day, Father would prepare for rough weather by wearing a derby hat and a black rubber mackintosh over his usual tailed coat. (He seldom was informal enough to wear a sack suit in town except on warm days, or when he left New York to go to the country, in summer.) If the sun was out, he wore a silk hat and carried a cane, like his friends. When he and they passed each other on the street, they raised their canes and touched the brims of their hats with them, in formal salute.

I admired this rich and splendid gesture, and wished I could imitate it, but I was too young for a cane. I was soberly dressed in a pepper-and-salt sack suit with short pants and the usual broad flat

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white Eton collar that boys wore in the eighties—a collar that started out very stiff and immaculate every morning and was done for by dinner time. Black laced or buttoned shoes and black stockings. We only wore brown in the country in summer.

On one of these Saturdays, although it was sunny, Father put on his derby. I didn't know why until later. I hopped along by his side as he walked through the long rows of comfortable-looking brownstone houses from Madison Avenue over to Sixth, climbed the stairs of the Elevated, and stood on the platform, chatting with one of his friends, while we waited for the next train.

Soon a stubby little steam engine, with its open coal car piled full of anthracite, and its three or four passenger cars swinging along behind, appeared round the curve. White smoke poured from the smokestack. The engineer leaned out from his window. "Too-oot, too-too-toot!" whistled the engine as it came puffing in. We got on board and walked leisurely through the cars till Father found a seat that he liked.

During the journey downtown, except when the smoke from the engine was too thick for me to see out, I stared fascinatedly into the windows of cheap red brick tenements, or at the even more interesting interiors of lodging houses for tramps. The second-floor rooms of the lodging houses were

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crowded, but I envied the tramps in them. They looked so easy-going. Not a thing to do; just tilt their chairs back against the wall, in comfortable old clothes, and smoke. If I were a tramp, I wouldn't have to scrub every last bit of grime out of my knuckles each Friday, and put on tight white kid gloves, and pull some unwieldy little girl around a waxed floor at dancing school. It wouldn't cost so very much, either. The lodging-house sign said in big letters, "Ten Cents a Night."

I never had a chance to see such sights except when I went downtown with Father, for Mother kept away from the Elevated. It was comparatively new, and she felt that the horsecars were better. Besides, Sixth Avenue was so cindery and sooty that ladies disliked it. They did go that far west sometimes, to shop, and they went as far east as Lexington, but in general they lived and walked in the long narrow strip between those two boundaries.

When Father and I left the train at the end of our journey, I found myself in a tangle of little streets full of men and boys but no women. If some lonely bonnet chanced to be bobbing along in the crowd, we all stared at it. Most of the business buildings were old and many of them were dirty, with steep, well-worn wooden stairways, and dark, busy basements. Exchange Place and Broad Street were full of these warrens, and there were

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some even on Wall Street. The southern corner of Wall Street and Broadway was one of the dingiest. Father raised his cane and said as we passed, "That's where Great-Aunt Lavinia was born."

A few doors beyond the Assay Office we came to a neat but narrow five-story building and walked up the front stoop. This was No. 38 Wall Street. Father's office occupied the ground floor, at the top of the stoop, and on the back part of the second floor he had a small storeroom.

The office was busy in what seemed to me a mysterious way. The cashier, who never would let me go inside his cage, sat in there on a stool, with a cash drawer, a safe full of books, another safe for securities, and a tin box full of postage stamps, which he doled out as needed. One or two bookkeepers were making beautifully written entries in enormous leather-bound ledgers. They had taken the stiff white detachable cuffs off their shirt-sleeves and stacked them in a corner, and they had exchanged their regular jackets for black alpaca coats. Future bookkeepers or brokers who now were little office boys ran in and out. Western Union messengers rushed in with telegrams. In the front room there was a long table full of the printed reports issued by railroads about their earnings and traffic. Only twenty or thirty industrial stocks were traded in on the Exchange in those