

The Acts of Life
a play by Jonathan Rand

jonathanrand.com
jr@jonathanrand.com
@MrJonathanRand

Cast of Characters

AVA
ADAM
ADVERTISEMENT
PAUL
LYDIA
SEAN
OLIVE
DAN
ZARIAH
HENRY
HENRY'S MOM
EVANGELINE
OWEN
ZOE
AARON
LINDSAY
DAWSON
STEVE
TRACY
BRENT
EVELYN
BECKETT
HARPER
CHRIS
VERA
VIOLET
VALENCIA
VIVENNE
VANESSA
VENUS
VICTORIA
VALERIE
VALENTINA
BARRY
STAN

BOBBY
OBIE
EDITH
BLANCHE
PENNY
GREG
GAME SHOW HOST
BELLA
SOCKS
HAIR GEL
DEODERANT
STATEMENT A
STATEMENT B
STATEMENT C
EMILIO
COLIN
RYAN
PROMISE A
PROMISE B
PROMISE C
EDIE
BELLA, AGE 15
ALECIA
MATH CLUB
CROSS COUNTRY
DRAMA
GOAL A
GOAL B
GOAL C
INSTANT WEDDING PARTICIPANTS
COOPER
CECILIA
LOGAN
DR. CHAN

Synopsis

Through a series of metaphorical and literal comedic vignettes, *The Acts of Life* follows one family across multiple generations as they grapple with those big stages: dating, marriage, childbirth, school, parenthood, and beyond.

Production Notes

If any technology or pop culture reference becomes dated, please replace with a modern reference. And feel free to be flexible with gender.

The cast size can be as small as 6 and as large as around 80—and should be handled as ideal for each production. For example, Ava and Adam can be played by the same performers throughout the play, but could also be portrayed by distinct performers in each scene. Regardless, it may be a good call to incorporate some color scheme and/or costume element that ties those characters together, telegraphing that these are the same characters throughout.

Acknowledgments

The Acts of Life was commissioned by LaVilla School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Florida where the 2020 premiere production was directed by Samuel Fisher and starred Olivia Harris, Brennan Mitchell, Ben Harris, Winsor Crenshaw, Ayviana Singh, Dakota Burton, Madeline Hinchliffe, Caleb Gaff, Bella Rose, Carolina Baldwin, Ruby Simmons, Ty Duva, Hannah Fussell, Lucy Woodward, Essence Stephenson, Sara Lester-Norman, Kate Gibson, Anastasia Clinkscales, Wallis Whelan, Austin Hadd, Akilah Prior, Sofia Marcilese, Mia Jorgensen, Fendie Pogue, and Elizabeth Jones.

The Acts of Life

a play by Jonathan Rand

I

All Thumbs

(Lights up to AVA and ADAM on their respective phones, in different locations. Between them – in some alternate void – is a personified ADVERTISEMENT.)

ADVERTISEMENT. Tired of casual, pointless dating?

(AVA and ADAM nod.)

Ready for a serious relationship?

(AVA and ADAM nod.)

Then try ThumbTime! Just swipe through the profiles. Don't like what you see? Move on with a simple Thumbs Down.

(ADVERTISEMENT gives a Thumbs Down with her actual thumb and we hear a fitting sound effect, e.g. DONK!)

But if this could be "The One," give 'em a Thumbs Up –

(ADVERTISEMENT gives a Thumbs Up and we hear a fitting sound effect, e.g. BING!)

– and a nice, blind coffee date could just turn into an even nicer, *not-blind wedding ceremony.*

(Very brief wedding sound effect / song.)

Try ThumbTime, *every time!* *(Tone change:)* Terms and conditions may apply.

(ADVERTISEMENT is gone. Skeptical, AVA and ADAM swipe through profiles on their phones, giving Thumbs Down after Thumbs Down, along with the sound effect. Eventually one profile on each phone incites a moment of consideration, followed by a hesitant Thumbs Up. Some very brief transitional lighting and/or music that leads to...)

(AVA and ADAM are either in the same spots or in chairs several feet away from each other – again in different locations. But on the other side of each of them is a chair where each of their blind dates will sit, also facing forward.)

AVA. Nice to meet you.

PAUL. Same here.

AVA. So ... tell me about yourself.

PAUL. Oh man – well, for starters I'm a real political junkie.

AVA. Yeah? I kinda pay attention.

PAUL. Oh I'm hooked. So much to think about – to *debate*.

AVA. Like what? Climate Change?

PAUL. Nah, that's just Glacial Discrimination.

AVA. Sorry, what?

PAUL. My real passion is Gum Control.

AVA. *Gum* Control?

PAUL. Yeah! I mean, the sugar-free is fine, but, like, Bubblicious or Juicy Fruit? Enough is enough.

AVA. That's not a thing.

PAUL. Or Clams' Gender rights!

AVA. What?

PAUL. Should we allow clams to use *any* clam bathroom, or do clams even *use* bathrooms – don't they pee in the ocean?

AVA. I can't tell if you're serious.

PAUL. No this is *important*. You know what really fires me up is the War on Pugs a.k.a. Pet Neutrality a.k.a. Border Collie Security. Or all the problems out there with *food*? There's the whole breakfast cereal scandal with the Immigration Bran, orrrrrr, y'know, Ben & Jerrymandering, orrrrrr Freedom of the French Press or Freedom of Peach... And listen: I love to kayak and eat salty food, so I'm fully behind the Boating Rights Act *and* the Bloating Rights Act; or what about Elfcare, whether it's Single-Player, or Medicaid, Medicare, or Medicant, or even just boycotting escalators because the real threat? Stairrorism.

AVA. You're serious.

PAUL. Dead serious. Oh and hey, listen: I may be a man, but I support you 100%. So please know you have my unwavering support when I give you these.

(He hands her a pair of sneakers.)

AVA. Why...?

(With utter sincerity, he holds his hand to his heart.)

PAUL. I believe in a Woman's Right to Shoes.

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

ADAM. Nice to meet you.

LYDIA. Meat is murder.

ADAM. No, not “meat” like “beef.” Like: it’s nice to make your acquaintance.

LYDIA. Oh so I’m your *acquaintance*? We can’t even be *friends*?

ADAM. Sorry – I’d like to *introduce* myself.

LYDIA. It’s alllll about you, isn’t it? Typical...

ADAM. Okay, how about a simple: Hi.

(*Beat.*)

LYDIA. I don’t do drugs.

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

AVA. So you’re an airline pilot.

SEAN. Yep.

AVA. That’s so neat.

SEAN. Yeah, I mean, obviously it feels almost *electric* spending your entire adult life above the clouds, but there’s also that profound *connection* with the other pilots and passengers – we’re all up there together. Y’know? We’re all at risk, but we have to trust each other. This is flight. This is mankind’s greatest triumph. Honestly it’s a dream come true.

AVA. I love that. What airline do you fly for?

SEAN. Uh, Disney.

AVA. Okay, so like their corporate jets?

SEAN. No, the tiny airplane ride at Disneyland.

(*Beat.*)

What a *rush*.

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

ADAM. So where you from?

OLIVE. Seventh Street.

ADAM. Oh, no, not where you live now, but where are you from originally?

OLIVE. Well before then I lived on Riverside Drive.

ADAM. No, I mean where were you when were little.

OLIVE. Ohhhhhhhhh. Preschool.

ADAM. No... In what place were you born.

OLIVE. Ah! Sorry! I'm an idiot.

ADAM. It's okay.

OLIVE. Where was I *born!*

ADAM. Yes.

OLIVE. *Got it, got it, got it.*

(Beat.)

A womb.

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

AVA. This place is pretty cool.

DAN. Yeah if you're a shill for Corporate America.

AVA. No, I mean I just think it's got an okay vibe.

DAN. That's what they want you to think.

AVA. Who's "they" exactly?

DAN. I would tell you, but — *(He looks around.)* — they're listening.

AVA. *Who's listening...?*

DAN. Shhhhhhhhhhh!

(DAN looks around suspiciously, then pulls out an easel pad or dry-erase board and writes something with a marker. Then shows it.)

POSTER. The NSA

AVA. Oh...

DAN. *(Whispers loudly:)* Or...

(He writes and shows.)

POSTER. The Illuminati

DAN. *(Whispers loudly:)* Or...

(Writes and shows.)

POSTER. Our Alien Overlords

DAN. *(Whispers loudly:)* Also...

(Writes and shows.)

POSTER. I have to pee.

(DAN casually stands and starts to exit.)

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

ADAM. So where are you from?

ZARIAH. The mean streets.

ADAM. Okay – *which* mean streets?

ZARIAH. Vermont.

ADAM. *Are* there mean streets in Vermont?

ZARIAH. (*Intensely:*) South Vermont.

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

AVA. So do you get along with your family and all?

HENRY. Yeah, like, my mom and I are pretty close.

(HENRY'S MOM emerges from behind HENRY out of nowhere.)

HENRY'S MOM. (*Emphatic:*) We're VERY close.

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

ADAM. So do you get along with your family and all?

EVANGELINE. Actually, I'm an orphan.

ADAM. Oh. Y'know I think you're the first orphan I've met. Was it tough, growing up?

EVANGELINE. Frankly, yeah. But hey – it is what it is.

ADAM. I'm sorry.

EVANGELINE. I mean, technically both my parents are alive and well, but – you get it.

ADAM. No?

EVANGELINE. Oh. I mean, when I was like eight? I think? My parents wouldn't get me this one video game for Christmas, so ever since they've just been dead to me.

ADAM. So they're alive...

EVANGELINE. THEY'RE DEAD TO ME.

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

AVA. So your profile said "legal professional."

OWEN. Mm-hm, yeah, actually I'm in the middle of this intense trial right now.

AVA. Oh yeah?

OWEN. You hear about that guy who cheated all those senior citizens with that credit card scam?

AVA. (*Chuckling:*) You're with the prosecution, I hope.

OWEN. (*Chuckling back:*) Okay, guilty as charged, I'm for the defense, but hear me out...

AVA. (*Open-mindedly:*) Okay...

OWEN. I'm representing myself.

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

ADAM. So you're a judge?

ZOE. No no, I'm judgmental.

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

(AARON wears a police uniform.)

AVA. So you're a cop.

AARON. Well, at parties.

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

(LINDSAY wears a large, plush bunny rabbit costume.)

ADAM. So you dress up for kids parties?

LINDSAY. Well... parties...

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

(DAWSON is on the date with AVA, but next to him is STEVE.)

AVA. So what do you do in your spare time?

STEVE. What *doesn't* he do? This guy's the *best*.

DAWSON. (*To STEVE:*) All right, man – chill.

STEVE. *Sorry sorry sorry* – I just get carried away.

DAWSON. I like the usual stuff – triathlons, college football, but I think my favorite thing is the Big Brothers program.

STEVE. Oh my god – this guy gives his *whole self* to helping others.

AVA. (*Indicating STEVE:*) Who's he?

DAWSON. Oh — Steve? He's kinda my assistant slash wingman slash hype man slash financial advisor slash life coach slash personal trainer slash executive chef slash masseuse slash frat buddy from college slash BEST FRIEND FOREVER.

STEVE. No *you're* the best.

DAWSON. No *you're* the best.

STEVE. We're *both* the best.

DAWSON. Nailed it.

(*Fist bump.*)

(*AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!*)

(*STEVE then takes DAWSON's place in the chair.*)

STEVE. Hi... Steve...

(*AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!*)

(*TRACY wears a wedding dress — veil and all. She's gasping for air, clearly having just finished a big run. ADAM is about to speak, but TRACY holds up a "one second" finger as she huffs and puffs. This goes on for a bit. Then:*)

TRACY. Hey listen... Real talk...? I just got out of a serious relationship.

(*ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!*)

AVA. So what are your hobbies?

BRENT. Oh, I mean, what *don't* I do — flag football, cooking, traveling, chugging several gallons of piping hot bacon fat, knitting... What else...?

AVA. Hold on — say that again?

BRENT. What, knitting? I mean, I guess it's technically *crochet*, but that always sounds so *French*.

AVA. No, the part about bacon fat?

BRENT. Yeah. I mean — call me old-fashioned!

AVA. I don't think that *is* old-fashioned.

BRENT. (*Grabbing a menu:*) Anyway, let's order! My buddy told me that we definitely need to try the several gallons of piping hot bacon fat. And the calamari.

(*AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!*)

EVELYN. So yeah it really hurts to lose someone like that. I mean, she was more than just my aunt – she was a mentor, a confidant – *everything*, really. Y’know what I mean?

ADAM. Yeah. When my grandma died, I had this overwhelming feeling of –

(EVELYN suddenly notices the music playing at the bar. Holds up a finger.)

EVELYN. –SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP.

ADAM. Uh –

EVELYN. SHUT UP!! Do you hear what they’re playing? I *love* this song! This is my *jam!*

(She really gets into the song, beat-boxing along, maybe dancing, maybe revealing glow sticks.)

ADAM. So my grandma –

EVELYN. I SAID SHUT UP. LET’S DANCE.

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

(BECKETT is full-on asleep – we witness a series of sporadic snore-bursts. This goes on for as long as it’s funny.)

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

(HARPER is swiping on her dating app while the date with ADAM is in progress.)

ADAM. So what do you do for a living?

HARPER. *(Buried in phone:)* One sec.

(Thumbs-Down-DONK! Thumbs-Up-BING! Thumbs-Down-DONK! Thumbs-Up-BING!)

ADAM. That’s kind of...impolite?

HARPER. Oh. I’m so sorry. Where are my manners...?

(HARPER scoots closer to ADAM and lets him look on her phone.)

What do you think about *him*? Nah, kinda doughy, right? Yeah, too doughy.

(Thumbs-Down-DONK!)

Ooh! I like him! You? Yeah, you know it’s on.

(Thumbs-Up-BING!)

(ADAM gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

AVA. Your profile said you work in music?

CHRIS. That's right.

AVA. So at a record label or — ?

CHRIS. No no no, not *music*. Moo-sick.

AVA. Moo-sick?

CHRIS. Yeah, I'm a cow surgeon.

(Beat.)

AVA. That's a thing?

CHRIS. Of course. But I'm not just a general Moo-sick practitioner. I specialize in Rock Moo-Sick, which is when the cows ingest stones and gravel. And also Hip Hop Moo-Sick, which is when a cow jumps through a field and twists her ankle.

(AVA gives a Thumbs Down. DONK!)

(AVA and ADAM sit on their usual chairs, but the other chairs are now gone, or at least empty. It's clear they're now on a date with each other.)

AVA. Hi.

ADAM. Hi.

AVA. Hey just so you know? This is probably my last date, ever. Staying single seems... less stressful.

ADAM. Yeah, same.

AVA. So I'll just skip the formalities and get right to it, if that's okay.

ADAM. Sure.

AVA. Are you into politics?

ADAM. No.

AVA. Conspiracy theories?

ADAM. No.

AVA. Stealing from the elderly?

ADAM. No.

AVA. Bovine medicine?

ADAM. No...?

AVA. Interesting...

ADAM. I've just got one question, actually.

AVA. Sure.

ADAM. Earlier today were you at your own wedding?

AVA. No.

ADAM. Huh. I like that. That's a good quality in a person.

AVA. *(Honored:)* Thank you.

ADAM. Interesting...

AVA. Yeah, interesting...

(They both consider all of this. Then:)

(They simultaneously give a Thumbs Up.)

(BING! BING!)

(Blackout.)

II

There's No "We" in "Wedding"

(Dueling wedding planner services – it could be that these are simply advertisements, or we see AVA and ADAM somewhere as the pitches happen, or another approach. The Spousal Sophistication team can be performed by anywhere between 1 and 9 performers.)

VERA. Welcome to Spousal Sophistication: the *only* wedding planner for nuptials of the utmost elegance. We take the wedding of your dreams and make those dreams seem like they were just punking you. Previous clients of great renown include Meryl Streep's former algebra teacher, the assistant set designer from that OneRepublic video, and me.

BARRY. I'm Barry from Barry's Budget Bridal Bonanza, where our motto is: "True Love is Priceless, but Our Price Is Less."

(Voiceover: FOOD)

VIOLET. With Spousal Sophistication, every morsel is organic, artisanal, small-batch, and impossibly delicious. For example: the wedding cake. Any transcendent cake begins with a transcendent recipe, and ours is a collaboration among Betty Crocker the Third, your great-great grandmother from the old country, and Cake Boss. Every ingredient is 100% harvested from scratch, all less than one hour before your guests arrive, and is 100% American, i.e. all eggs are hand-picked from our exclusive coop of free-range Bald Eagles. Not only will the cake be the most exquisite dessert ever baked, but it is, by some miracle, somehow ... fat-free.

BARRY. We serve only the hottest of pockets. *(Reveals a box of Hot Pockets and presents it with a sophisticated flourish of his hand.)*

(Voiceover: FLOWERS)

VALENCIA. Spousal Sophistication provides only the rarest flowers, like the Ancient Polynesian Orchid, a rather in-demand breed given it's on the verge of extinction. You'll take comfort as our team of wildly overqualified horticulturists begin the floral journey at the germination level. Each individual seed is supervised 24/7 by heavily armed Botanic Bodyguards, a.k.a. – trademark pending – "Seedcret Service Agents."

BARRY. The bride holds up her phone with this picture of kinda nice flowers on it.

(Voiceover: CEREMONY)

VIVENNE. The Spousal Sophistication private jet whisks you and your guests away to a secluded tropical island where 360 days of the year the weather is 78 degrees with cloudless skies. On the other five days, the ceremony is held inside a giant, glass, weather-controlled dome.

BARRY. We do the ceremony in my garage. Throw in ten bucks, I cover the washing machine with a beach towel.

This is just a script sample.
For the full play, visit TRWPlays.com

For Personal Use Only
DO NOT DISTRIBUTE