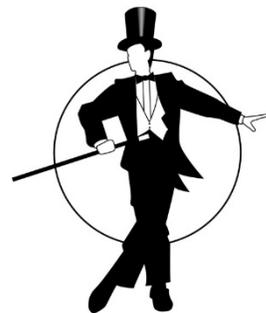


A Life Enriching Community

Philip Middleton Williams



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A LIFE ENRICHING COMMUNITY

By Philip Middleton Williams

CAST

ADAM: Late sixties, looks his age.

MICHELLE: Perky, well-dressed.

PAUL: Late sixties but looks younger.

Place

A living room in a condominium in a retirement community in South Florida.

Time

Present day.

A Life Enriching Community was first performed at the New Theatre Miami 1-Acts Festival Winter Session at the Main Street Theatre in Miami Lakes, Florida, directed by Jerry Jensen. The cast was as follows:

Adam.....	Joel Kolker
Michelle.....	Francine Birns
Paul.....	Philip Middleton Williams

A LIFE ENRICHING COMMUNITY

The action takes place in a living room in a condominium in a retirement community in South Florida. Center stage are two identical easy chairs that face downstage at a forty-five-degree angle to the center line and ninety degrees to each other. There is a standing lamp between them. Stage Left is the exit to the rest of the condo: the kitchen and the bedroom. Stage Right is a sliding patio door that looks out into a small back yard. The back wall is plain. There are several boxes from a moving company on the floor, but other than those and the chairs and lamp, the stage is empty.

At rise: Adam is sitting in his chair reading the Miami Herald. He holds the paper up so that we cannot see his face. From what we can see of him, he is dressed in casual attire for a man in his late sixties: slacks and comfortable shoes. He turns the page of the paper, his face still unseen, mutters a sound of disgust, and keeps reading.

Michelle enters followed by Paul. Michelle is well-dressed in a casual business outfit. She is carrying a clipboard and a binder. Paul is in his mid to late sixties with signs of age but still looking fit and active. As they enter, Michelle is checking things off the list.

MICHELLE: All right, then, we've seen the kitchen and the laundry area, and we've looked at the big storage closet out by the garage. And I've shown you where the emergency call box is in each room. All you have to do is hit the big red button and our team will be right over.

PAUL: Yes, you have.

MICHELLE: *(digging in her pocket, pulls out two small keypads on lanyards)* And here are the Life Alert buttons that you should carry with you at all times just in case.

PAUL: 'I've fallen, and I can't get up!' Yes, thank you.

MICHELLE: One for you, Mr. Henderson. *(Looking at Adam.)* And one for you, Mr. Connolly.

(No response from Adam.)

PAUL: I'll make sure he wears it.

MICHELLE: Great. Well, if I can get you to sign here, here, here, initial here and here, then we're all done.

(hands Paul the clipboard and with a little help from Michelle, signs and initials.)

PAUL: *(handing back the clipboard)* There! And that's it, right? We're all done? No more papers to read, sign, initial, notarize, swear to, or give over our entire life savings for?

MICHELLE: *(genially)* That's it. You're all done. *(Hands Paul the binder.)* Here's your reference manual. Everything you'll need to know is in it. And on behalf of myself and the entire staff here at Coral Gardens, welcome. I'm sure you know that we have lots of social events, activities, trips to the Everglades, down to the Keys, even overnight trips to Disney World and other places. The pool is open year-round. We have a bike path, a nature trail, and there's plenty of natural beauty around. *(Smiles brilliantly.)* We're so glad to have you with us and look forward to a long and happy time here in our life enriching community.

ADAM: *(derisively, to himself)* 'Life enriching.' Sheesh.

PAUL: Thanks. *(thumbs through the binder.)* A lot to get used to.

MICHELLE: Yes, it must be quite a change from *(looks at clipboard)* Pee...too...sky?

ADAM: *(sharply)* Petoskey. Puh-tahs-key.

MICHELLE: That's way up north in Michigan?

PAUL: Yep, the tip of the mitt.

MICHELLE: Beg pardon?

PAUL: Well, you know how the Lower Peninsula is shaped like a mitten? Like a hand? Petoskey is right up there on the very top. Just below the big bridge to the Upper Peninsula.

ADAM: So now we're down here at the tip of the dick. Doesn't Florida look like a limp dingus?

(Paul clears his throat and scowls. Adam subsides.)

MICHELLE: Oh, that's okay, I've heard it before. But I'm sure you'll fit in. Lots of people retire here, including from Michigan.

PAUL: Like they used to say on the *Jackie Gleason show*, "It's the sun and fun capital of the world."

ADAM: Great. Skin cancer and drug smuggling.

MICHELLE: Jackie Who?

PAUL: Oh, um, never mind. Before your time.

MICHELLE: Miami's a very diverse place. Lots of neighborhoods like Little Haiti, Little Havana...

ADAM: We don't speak Spanish.

MICHELLE: Not a problem. Or, as we say, "*no problemo.*"

ADAM: Oy veh.

MICHELLE: Oh, did I mention we also offer free shuttle service to the Publix supermarket down the street, to Dadeland Mall, and of course to any doctor's appointments —

PAUL: (*cutting her off*) Thank you very much...Michelle, is it?

MICHELLE: Yes, sir.

PAUL: Good. Will we be seeing a lot of you around?

MICHELLE: Well, they keep me pretty busy at the main office, but I'm sure we'll see each other around.

PAUL: Oh, great.

MICHELLE: Okay, so unless there's anything else, I'll let myself out. And again, welcome to Coral Gardens.

(*Michelle starts to exit Left, but Adam puts down the paper.*)

ADAM: Are we the first?

MICHELLE: Beg pardon?

ADAM: Are we the first?

MICHELLE: I'm not sure I understand.

PAUL: He means are we the first, um...

ADAM: What I mean is, are we the first gay couple here at this 'life enriching community.'

MICHELLE: Oh, I don't know. But then, we don't... We don't discriminate against anyone here. Very strict policy. Everyone's welcome.

ADAM: But there are no other couples like us here, are there?

MICHELLE: Well, no, not that I'm aware of. But I'm sure there are other people here who are... This is Miami, after all.

ADAM: I'm glad to hear you're so open-minded.

MICHELLE: Oh, yes, I'm... We're a very welcoming place. *(Beat.)* Okay, well, unless there's anything else...

PAUL: No, thanks, we're good. We'll be fine.

MICHELLE: *(beaming broadly)* Great! Let us know if you need anything. And don't forget... we're here for *you*.

(Michelle exits. Paul watches her go, drops the binder on his chair, then wanders around the room ending up by the sliding glass door. Adam puts down the paper.)

PAUL: She seems nice.

ADAM: Oh, she's just shitting rainbows.

PAUL: It's a nice place, don't you think?

ADAM: It's fine. I love it. (*clearly he does not.*) It's always been a dream of mine to spend the rest of my life with a bunch of old white Republicans in a cracker-box house in the middle of a bug-infested swamp.

PAUL: Oh, come on. It's plenty big for us, there's room for all of your books, and we've got a view of the swimming pool. That should be fun: maybe a little eye-candy?

ADAM: Are you kidding? Unless one of the other guests has a hunky twenty-something grandson, the only bulge you're going to see in a Speedo is a hernia.

PAUL: At least the pool will be open all year. The weather is going to be a lot better than Michigan. Weren't you getting a little tired of three seasons: Winter, July, and August? Fourteen feet of snow every year? Dark at four o'clock in the afternoon, no sun for months? Hell, Adam, people got so depressed they held the Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in the high school gym. And in the summer, the roads are clogged with RV's, the shops crowded with ugly people in tank-tops and flip-flops dragging squalling kids and bored teenagers? At least down here they stick to the beach.

ADAM: I like the change of seasons. I like seeing the leaves change in autumn. I love the first snowfall, the crackle and smell of cedar logs in the fireplace, the comfort of a wool hat and mittens.

PAUL: (*countering*) The dry air, the nosebleeds, the carpet shocks that could light up the sky, and (*pointedly*) the ice in the driveway.

(*A beat. Adam glares at Paul.*)

ADAM: Screw you.

PAUL: We'll save that until the bed is set up.

ADAM: I lost my balance, that's all. I shouldn't have been out there in my loafers.

PAUL: And if Harry hadn't heard you, you would have laid there until you were dead. It was just plain luck he was outside shoveling his walk.

ADAM: I would have been able to get back into the house. I was trying.

PAUL: You broke your hip in two places! You were like an upside-down turtle! It was twelve degrees and snowing like crazy!

(Adam waves him off and starts to get up from the chair. He struggles for a moment, then stays seated.)

ADAM: Shit.

PAUL: Where's your cane?

ADAM: I left it in the kitchen.

PAUL: Jesus, you're not supposed to walk without it for another month.

ADAM: I'm not supposed to eat red meat and bacon and yet I do.

PAUL: I'll get it.

ADAM: No, dammit, I'll do it. *(Struggles to get up. Paul comes over and begins to help him up.)* I can do it.

PAUL: *(backing away)* Okay, fine.

(Adam again starts to get up. He fails, heaves a sigh, and then looks at Paul in mute appeal. Paul comes over and helps him to his feet. They stand facing each other.)

PAUL: May I have this dance?

(They both crack up and hug.)

ADAM: Hoo boy. Thanks.

PAUL: I'll get your cane.

(Paul goes off SL. Adam slowly shuffles over to the sliding patio door and looks out. Paul returns with the cane and gives it to Adam.)

ADAM: How many places have we lived in?

PAUL: *(thinking for a moment)* Six? Two apartments in Boulder, the duplex in Santa Fe, the condo in Albuquerque, that little place while you were on sabbatical in Seattle, and then the house in Petoskey.

ADAM: So why here? Remind me again why we needed to move here?

PAUL: How many places did we look at? The one in Ann Arbor was too expensive. The place in Cincinnati was too Republican. Louisville was too rural. Tucson was too hot. Seattle was too wet. Baltimore was too crowded. Toledo was...

ADAM: Toledo.

PAUL: So here we are, Goldilocks.

ADAM: But why Miami? Why Florida?

PAUL: You don't remember?

ADAM: Remember what?

PAUL: Our first vacation together. We went to Key West for a week. We stayed in the Palm Grove, that little "men-only" guest house on Fleming Street with the clothing-optional pool. The last night after we'd had that amazing dinner on the waterfront and walked home holding hands in the moonlight you said you could live here forever.

ADAM: That was thirty-five years ago. You expect me to remember that?

PAUL: I did.

ADAM: You remember everything. At the most inconvenient time. This isn't exactly Key West.

PAUL: It's close enough. I also remember that the morning after you were taken to the hospital and the doctors screwed your hip back together you looked up at me and whispered, "Let's get the fuck out of this icebox."

ADAM: I was heavily drugged.

PAUL: Look, you've done your time for queen and country. You've earned your retirement. Thirty years of teaching, of lecturing, of endless faculty meetings with thuddingly dull colleagues who haven't got a clue about life outside their own classrooms. Thirty-years of slack-jawed teenagers who haven't had an original thought in their heads since it was taken over by overactive genitalia and hormones. You came home every night cursing and dreading the next day. Aside from the near-death

experience with hypothermia, it was a blessing you slipped on the ice. It was a sign. God was saying "Get thee to Miami."

ADAM: This is not exactly the Palm Grove. (*Beat.*) Well, at least the chairs and the lamp made it.

PAUL: Remember when we got them?

ADAM: That I do. You got an inheritance check from your grandmother. We went to Sears and ordered them.

PAUL: Our first real furniture. No more wicker porch furniture from Pier One and shipping crates for end tables, no more futon for a bed.

ADAM: Cinder blocks and planks for bookshelves. (*Looks around.*) Where's the rest of our stuff?

PAUL: What we didn't sell in the garage sale or give to Goodwill is still on the moving van. But I told them to deliver these first thing. Just something to make the place familiar.

ADAM: It's very nice. (*He comes over and pats the chair.*) So this is it, this "life enriching community." The last place we're going to live.

PAUL: (*shrugging*) Probably.

ADAM: Why not some little bungalow on the water in Key West within sight of the beach boys cavorting in the surf? We have enough money; we could afford it.

PAUL: (*picks up the binder, opens it*) I just thought a place like this—with all the amenities—would be more practical, that's all.

ADAM: More practical. (*Long pause while he scowls at Paul, who looks away.*) More practical with all the amenities. The next step up being assisted living, then long-term care, then hospice. (*Another long pause.*) It's back, isn't it. You're not in remission anymore.

PAUL: (*after a pause*) My white count's a little elevated, that's all. It could be nothing. Just getting over an infection. A cold.

(Adam turns away. Paul goes to him, but Adam waves him away.)

ADAM: How long have you known?

PAUL: When you were in for your last therapy session I had them do a check-up. Everything's been fine for the last ten years so I figured, hey what the hell, I've got insurance. *(Ruefully.)* Ta da.

ADAM: That was three months ago. Right before you started talking to the salespeople here, before all those brochures and CD's and Power Points with the ever-so-happy senior citizens living out their golden years in this life enriching community. It wasn't for me; it was for you.

PAUL: It was for us. You and me. It's nice and warm here, the place is well-taken care of, and, not for nothing, that little hospital in Petoskey just doesn't have what it takes to take care of us. Miami has some of the best medical centers and doctors in the country for – that sort of thing.

ADAM: You can say it.

PAUL: I'd rather not. Look, Fred Kinderman got me a referral to one of the best guys in the country. I looked him up. He's from Sloan Kettering.

ADAM: *(thoughtfully)* Fred's a good man. So, when do you see the doctor?

PAUL: Next week. If I need to, I start chemo the week after. *(Paul sits in his chair, leans back and closes his eyes, perhaps remembering the last time he went through chemo.)*

ADAM: Got it all planned out, haven't you? Well, that's how you've always been. *(Adam sits in his chair.)* I'll see what I can do about finding someone to supply you. *(Chuckles.)* I'll ask Michelle. This is Miami, and she looks hip enough to know how to score some pot.

PAUL: I packed my old bong. It's in the box marked "medical equipment" along with the other toys.

ADAM: Of course. *(Beat.)* I love you.

PAUL: I love you, too.

ADAM: *(looks around the room)* Okay, well now that we've gotten that out of the way: what do we do now?

PAUL: We do what we've always done no matter where we are. We make the most of it. We live, you and I.

(Paul smiles, then reaches over and clasps Adam's hand.)

ADAM: Oh. Well, I feel enriched already.

THE END