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OLD YELLER

adapted for the stage by **Brian Guehring**
from the Newberry Honor novel by **Fred Gipson**
a play with puppets for a minimum of 3m/2f

Draft # 1.57
production draft

When his Papa leaves on a long cattle drive, fourteen year old Travis has to become the man of the family. Then Old Yeller, a mangy one-eared thieving mutt, shows up, and Travis wants nothing to do with him. Old Yeller however proves to be a huge help to Travis and his family on the wild Texas frontier. Strong and courageous, Old Yeller earns Travis's love when the dog helps save the family from a bear, wild pigs and a rabid wolf. However, when Old Yeller gets hydrophobia and must be shot, Travis is faced with the most difficult duty of his young life.

Old Yeller was originally produced by the Omaha Theater Company for school groups and public audiences in the fall of 2006 and ran approximately 60 minutes.

CAST

Travis	Michael Harrelson	Old Yeller/Lisabeth	Suzanne Withem
Mama	Jessica Runck	Arliss	Brian Guehring
	Papa/Searcy/Sanderson	Earl Bates	

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director: Kevin Ehrhart	Puppetry Designer: Trish Place
Set Designer: Mark Lewis	Costume Designer: Sherri Geerdes
Light Designer : Andrew Vance	Development Dramaturg: Michael Miller

Old Yeller is scheduled for an Omaha Theater Company national tour during the 2007-08 school year.

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OLD YELLER

a play for a minimum of 3 men/2 women

Human Characters

TRAVIS	a 14 year old boy trying to become a man
MAMA	his down to Earth mother
ARLISS	his 5 year old brother
*PAPA	a Texas rancher
LISABETH	a hard-working, shy 11 year old girl
*SEARCY	Lisabeth's talkative Grandpa
*SANDERSON	a young cowboy; Old Yeller's first owner

** Papa, Searcy, and Burn can be played by the same actor in a five person cast*

Puppet Characters

OLD YELLER	a clever, courageous, thieving mutt
MAMA BEAR	an angry she-bear
CUB	a young bear cub
HOGS	bar hogs with long tusks (3)
BULL	a bull with hydrophobia
WOLF	a big, loafer wolf gone mad
PUP	a speckled, rascally puppy of Old Yeller.

This show is envisioned to use a large range of puppetry. Old Yeller is envisioned to be a detailed rod puppet with the puppeteer in full view. The Bear, cub and wolf puppets are envisioned to be shadow puppets. The Bull puppet is envisioned to be a puppet as an extension of the actor (similar to the Broadway Lion King puppets). The Hogs puppets could be rod puppets or hand puppets.

**for a five person cast, the Lisabeth actress works the Old Yeller puppet while the Papa actor works the Bear and Wolf puppets the Mama works bear cub, Arliss, Mama & Papa work the hog puppets Arliss or Papa can work the Bull puppet*

**for a six person cast, the Papa actor works the Old Yeller puppet while Lisabeth actress works the Bear and hog puppets the Searcy/Sanderson actor works the bull and wolf puppets*

Settings

the Coates log cabin in the hill country of Central Texas
the surrounding woods, desert, and hills

Time

the late 1860's

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scene 1 man of the house

(TRAVIS walks on stage and addresses audience as an older teen or young man.)

TRAVIS

We called him Old Yeller. I remember like yesterday how he strayed in out of nowhere to our log cabin on Birdsong Creek. Old Yeller made me so mad at first that I wanted to kill him. Then, later, I came to love him like one of my own folks. That's how much I'd come to think of the big yeller dog. Which is why it was so hard to do what I had to do.

We lived in the hill country of Texas surrounded by grey mockingbirds nesting in the mesquite trees, nearsighted armadillos rooting for grubs in the rescue grass, and jack rabbits sleeping among the bluebonnets.

Old Yeller came in the summer of 1868. I had just turned 14. That was the year that Papa and a bunch of other Salt Lick settlers decided to herd their cattle up to Kansas.

(Lights fade up on set of the Coates' log house and the Texas hill country. Music is heard.

TRAVIS becomes his 14 year old self acting out his memories. PAPA is packing his things.

MAMA is saying good-bye)

MAMA

How long will you be gone?

PAPA

The drive is 600 miles. It'll take a few months.

MAMA

Don't worry about us. We'll make out fine.

PAPA

We can make a lot of money selling the cattle in Abeline.

MAMA

Yes, and all we lack having a tight tail-holt on the world is a little cash money.

PAPA

We have everything else we need.

(MAMA and PAPA hug good-bye)

TRAVIS

Whatever a man does, he's gotta take some risks.

PAPA

That's right, son.

TRAVIS

Don't worry, Papa. I'll take care of us.

MAMA

Now, Travis, you're too young to worry about taking care of the family.

TRAVIS

I'm fourteen years old, Mama. I'm pretty near a grown man. I can keep meat on our table, split all the logs for firewood, and take care of our milk cows.

Our young boy is growing up, Katie.	PAPA
Wait for me! Wait for me!	ARLISS <i>(ARLISS, Travis's 5 year old brother comes running on stage with a squiggling lizard)</i>
Lil Arliss, what have you got in your hand?	MAMA
A lizard! Its a goin away present.	ARLISS <i>(MAMA backs away and PAPA holds out his hand)</i>
That's very kind Arliss.	PAPA
Its not for you. Its for Mama.	ARLISS <i>(ARLISS holds it for MAMA who squeals a bit)</i>
Arliss, Papa is goin away. Not Mama.	TRAVIS
But I'm goin with Papa.	ARLISS
No, dear, you're staying here.	MAMA
NO! I'm goin with Papa!	ARLISS
You can't, son.	PAPA
NO!! Take me with you!	ARLISS
Arliss, you need to stay here and help Mama.	PAPA <i>(PAPA tries to hug the kicking and screaming ARLISS)</i>
Be a good boy.	PAPA
Noooo! I want to go on the horses! NOOOOOOOO!	ARLISS
Arliss, you stop yelling and squirming or I'll take you inside right now.	MAMA

ARLISS
NO! I'm not staying! I'm goin with PAPA!

MAMA
Hurry back, Papa. Hurry Back.

(MAMA drags ARLISS kicking and screaming
back to the cabin)

PAPA
Now, Travis, you're gettin to be a big boy; and while I'm gone, you'll be the man of the family.

TRAVIS
Yessir.

PAPA
Now, there's the cows to milk and young pigs to mark and fresh meat to shoot. But mainly there's the corn patch. If you don't work it right or if you let the varmits eat up the roasting ears, we'll be without bread corn for the winter.

TRAVIS
Don't worry, I'm doin all that already.

PAPA
And watch out for the grizzly bears and wolves.

TRAVIS
I'll keep them from eating too many of our hogs.

PAPA
I want you to stay out of their way. They're too dangerous for you to deal with.

TRAVIS
Don't worry. I'm a good shot. And I'm practically a man already.

PAPA
Now, son, there's more to being a man than shooting things and working hard.

TRAVIS
What do you mean, Papa?

PAPA
I want you to act like a man. You take care of Mama and Little Arliss, not just yourself. And you don't wait around for your mama to point out what needs to be done. Think you can do that?

TRAVIS
Yessir.

PAPA
All right, boy. I'll be seeing you this fall.
(PAPA turns to go)

Wait!

TRAVIS

Yeah, boy. What is it?

PAPA

The horse.

TRAVIS

What horse? You mean you're wanting a horse?

PAPA

Now, Papa, you know I've been aching all over for a horse to ride. I've told you time and again.

TRAVIS

Which is why you bring it up every minute of every hour? Travis, what you're needing worse than a horse is a good dog.

PAPA (*grinning*)

If you say so, sir.

TRAVIS

You remember how much Bell helped out around here. He protected you from rattlesnakes, went hunting with you, and even saved you from drownin in the creek. A dog could help you with the hogs, the cattle, and even keeping critters out of the cornfield. Its been a year since he died, Travis. Don't you think its time to get a new dog.

PAPA

No, sir. No dog could ever take Bell's place. A horse is what I'm wanting the worse.

TRAVIS

All right. You act a man's part while I'm gone, and I'll see that you get a man's horse to ride when I sell the cattle. I think we can shake on that deal.

(TRAVIS and PAPA shake. PAPA exits)

TRAVIS (*directly to the audience*)

That was the first time I'd ever shaken hands like a man. It made me feel big and solemn and important in a way I'd never felt before. I knew then that I could handle whatever needed to be done while Papa was gone.

(TRAVIS can now see ARLISS playing in the watering hole)

TRAVIS

Arliss! You get out of our drinking water!

(ARLISS sticks out his tongue)

TRAVIS

I'll cut me a sprout!

TRAVIS

You aren't Papa.

ARLISS

(TRAVIS cuts down a branch and comes after ARLISS. ARLISS screams at the top of his lungs and races to the house. MAMA comes racing out)

MAMA

Travis, what on earth have you done to your little brother?

TRAVIS

Nothing yet, but if he doesn't keep out of our drinking water, I'm going to wear him to a frazzle.

(MAMA looks at TRAVIS and then smiles. SHE grabs ARLISS by the ear)

MAMA

Look here, young squirrel. You better listen to your big brother Travis if you want to keep out of trouble. Go sit in your room.

(LIL ARLISS sulks off as TRAVIS feels satisfied)

MAMA

Travis, step out into the dog run and cut down a side of middling meat hanging to the pole rafters.

(MAMA hangs out laundry to dry and beats the dirt out of the clothes with a battling stick. TRAVIS goes to the dog run and notices the meat is gone.)

TRAVIS

Where's the meat? Did some critter get it?

(He looks around and soon OLD YELLER pops up from his hiding place. OLD YELLER is big, slick-haired yeller dog. One short ear has been chewed off and his tail is a short stub that's waggin)

TRAVIS

Why, you thievin' rascal! You don't even have the manners to feel ashamed of what you've done.

(TRAVIS kicks, but misses OLD YELLER. OLD YELLER, though, starts squawling and bawling like he's broken every bone in his body. MAMA comes running in)

MAMA

What on earth, Travis?

TRAVIS

Why, this old stray dog has come and eaten our middling meat clear up!

(TRAVIS aims another kick at OLD YELLER, who easily avoids it, but starts acting hurt again. ARLISS enters)

ARLISS

A dog! A dog! A Yeller dog!

(ARLISS pets OLD YELLER)

ARLISS
You kick my dog, and I'll wear you to a frazzle!
(ARLISS takes up a battling stick and whacks the surprised TRAVIS before Mama holds ARLISS who is kicking and screaming)

ARLISS
He's my dog. You can't hurt him.

TRAVIS
I didn't even touch him! I missed him.

MAMA
BOYS!
(MAMA separates the boys. ARLISS runs over to OLD YELLER, who starts licking him)

ARLISS
He's my dog!

MAMA
It looks like we just got us a dog.

TRAVIS
But Mama, you don't mean we'd keep an old ugly dog like that. He'll come in and steal meat right out of the house.

MAMA
Well, maybe we can't keep him. Maybe he belongs to somebody around here who'll want him back.

TRAVIS
He doesn't belong to anybody in the settlement. I know every dog at Salt Licks.

MAMA
Well, then, if he's a stray, there's no reason why Little Arliss can't claim him. And you'll have to admit he's a smart dog. Mighty few dogs have sense enough to figure out a way to reach a side of meat hanging that high. He must have climbed on top of the meal barrel and jumped.

ARLISS
My dog's smart.

MAMA
What are you going to call it, Arliss?
ARLISS (thinking)
...Yeller!

TRAVIS
'Cus he yells like scaredy cat.

ARLISS

No! Cus that's his color! C'mon Old Yeller.

(ARLISS and OLD YELLER exit)

TRAVIS

Fine, he's smart. But I still don't like him. He yells as much as Arliss.

MAMA

Now, Travis, You're not being fair. You had a dog when you were little, but Arliss never had one. Your brother gets lonely. Now you get your gun and try to kill us a fat young doe for meat. And while you're gone, I want you to do some thinking on what I said about Little Arliss and this stray dog.

(MAMA exits as TRAVIS takes gun and sits waiting for doe)

TRAVIS *(to audience)*

When Mama got her mind set a certain way, there's no use arguing with her. However, I didn't aim to have a meat-thieving dog on the place. As I sat quietly by the Salt Licks waiting for several hours, I plotted ways to get rid of that dog. I was thinking so hard, I almost didn't see the doe arrive.

(TRAVIS suddenly picks up his rifle and shoots off-stage. HE goes and brings back a doe)

TRAVIS *(to audience)*

I had made a killing shot on a moving deer. I felt big and strong and sure of myself. I had gotten meat for the family, just like Papa. I felt so good, I didn't fuss about Little Arliss and that old yeller dog. When you're nearly a man, you have to learn to have to put up with a lot of aggravation from little old bitty kids. I figured I could even provide enough meat for that thieving dog.

But then I saw what Arliss and that mutt were doin.

(TRAVIS sees ARLISS and OLD YELLER in the drinking pool)

TRAVIS

Arliss! You get that nasty old dog out of our drinking water!

(ARLISS jumps out scared and starts screaming. OLD YELLER bays at TRAVIS with his fur rising on his back. TRAVIS puts down doe and picks up a rock and throws it toward OLD YELLER who yells. TRAVIS throws a second one and OLD YELLER runs away)

TRAVIS

That'll teach you, you dumb dog.

ARLISS

Leave my dog alone!

(ARLISS picks up rock and throws it at TRAVIS, who ducks)

TRAVIS

Arliss, you quit that!

(ARLISS keeps throwing.)

TRAVIS

I can't get into a rock fight with you, Arliss.

(ARLISS keeps throwing. TRAVIS finally runs toward the house. MAMA comes out of the house)

What on earth, boys?

MAMA

You better catch that Arliss!

TRAVIS

(TRAVIS runs to safety as MAMA finally grabs LITTLE ARLISS and takes away the rock from his hand)

Travis Henry Coates, what is going on?

MAMA

TRAVIS

Arliss and that mangy mutt were playing in the drinking water.

MAMA

Arliss, you know better than that. Go to your room and wait for me. You're getting a swtichin.

ARLISS

But Travis was throwing rocks at my dog! At Old Yeller.

MAMA

I'll take care of Travis. To your room.

(ARLISS sulks off to room)

MAMA

Travis, young man, what are you thinking?

TRAVIS

Me? Arliss was throwing rocks at my head!

MAMA

He's five years old. You're fourteen. You should know better. You knew how he'd react if you threw rocks at that dog of his.

TRAVIS

We shouldn't even keep that mutt. How can I be the man of this family if nobody pays attention to what I think or say?

MAMA

If you want to be treated like a man, then act like one.

(TRAVIS sulks off as MAMA leaves to punish ARLISS. OLD YELLER sulks on stage)

TRAVIS *(to AUDIENCE)*

There wasn't even any point of telling her about shooting the doe. What was the use? She treated me like I wasn't any older than Little Arliss. The more I thought about it, the madder I got at the big yeller dog. And I got an idea.

(TRAVIS cuts a strip of meat from the doe and hangs it up in the dog run where the middling meat was)

TRAVIS *(to Old Yeller)*

Come'on dog. Don't you want any meat? Go ahead. Prove you're a thievin rascal.
(OLD YELLER ignores the meat and exits)

TRAVIS *(to audience)*

But Old Yeller was too smart for that. Not once did he ever even act like he could smell the meat I'd hung up.