

SEASON 50.3 PlayNotes



Saint Dad
written by **Monica Wood**

ISSUE 01
PORTLAND STAGE

Discussion Series

Join us for a Book Club-style **Page to Stage** with the Portland Public Library. Check out your copy of the script and join us two weeks before previews of each Mainstage Production. Scripts are available at the reference desk at the Main Branch of the Portland Public Library. This year discussions will be held in the Rines Room at 5pm two weeks before a show opens. Feel free to come and chat about the plays with Literary Manager, Todd Brian Backus; his Directing and Dramaturgy Apprentices, and special guests. Visit portlandlibrary.com/programs-events/ for more information.

The Artistic Perspective, hosted by Artistic Director Anita Stewart, is an opportunity for audience members to delve deeper into the themes of the show through conversation with special guests. A different scholar, visiting artist, playwright, or other expert will join the discussion each time. The Artistic Perspective discussions are held after the first Sunday matinee performance.

Curtain Call discussions offer a rare opportunity for audience members to talk about the production with the performers. Through this forum, the audience and cast explore topics that range from the process of rehearsing and producing the text to character development to issues raised by the work. Curtain Call discussions are held after the second Sunday matinee performance.

All discussions are free and open to the public. Show attendance is not required. To subscribe to a discussion series performance, please call the Box Office at 207.774.0465.



HANNAH CORDES, PAULA VOGEL, ANITA STEWART, AND TODD BRIAN BACKUS IN A TALKBACK, PORTLAND STAGE COMPANY.

Saint Dad

by Monica Wood

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Letter from the Editors

Dear PlayNotes Readers,

Welcome to another edition of Playnotes!

In this issue, we explore the world of *Saint Dad*, a new comedy by Maine-based playwright Monica Wood about siblings Denise, Suzanne, and Bud who, sold their childhood camp when they thought their father was at death's door, but now that he's made a miraculous recovery, they need to soften the blow. Chaos ensues as they encounter the camp's new owner Leona and her rebellious daughter Thomasina. Through equal parts hilarity and warmth, the group discovers what it means to find home.

Curious about the real-life inspiration for this play? Check out the article "Upta Camp" (pg. 12) or find out more about Maine's housing & resident retention challenges with "Vacationland & Maine's Housing Crisis" and "Getting Out; the Push for Young Mainers to Leave While They Can" (pgs. 16-18).

Want to learn about this production of **Saint Dad**? Head over to our "Interview with Director Sally Wood & Playwright Monica Wood" (pg. 10).

Eager to get involved with the causes the play highlights? Check out our "Recommended Resources" (pg. 20) to learn how you can impact the state with organizations such as the Realize Maine Network and Maine State Housing Authority.

When compiling each issue of *PlayNotes*, we strive to provide articles and interviews that give you insight into what the process has been like behind the scenes (see articles in "Portland Stage's *Saint Dad*"), contain pertinent information about the play's setting and major themes ("The World of *Saint Dad*"), and provide deeper dives into specific subjects that compelled our literary department ("Digging Deeper"). We include a list of books, plays, and other media that we hope audiences will access for more cultural content that relates to the play ("Recommended Resources").

We are so excited to have you join us in welcoming our 50th season, and we hope you enjoy seeing *Saint Dad*.

Sincerely yours,

The Portland Stage Literary Department
Todd Brian Backus
Julia Jennings
Alex Oleksy
Jessi Stier

About the Play

by Alex Oleksy

Family can push us to our very limits as we grow together, succeed together, and fall flat on our faces together. Such is the case for the Casey family of *Saint Dad*, Monica Wood's hilarious new play about finding community, reclaiming your beliefs, and a giant moosehead. Following the sudden reawakening of their comatose father, siblings Denise, Bud, and Suzanne must convince Leona, the new owner of their longtime family camp, to help them hide the sale from their possibly divine "Saint Dad." When Leona's rebellious daughter Thomasina and the Caseys' beloved family friend Chummy join the mix, the dynamic group begins to question what it means to be a family, and who really deserves to be redeemed.

Wood's hysterical play set on the fictional Greaney Lake in Maine marks her third production at Portland Stage, as well as her third collaboration with director Sally Wood, a longtime affiliate artist of the company. When asked about their continued collaboration, the playwright said, "I just love Sally to bits. She's made both of my other plays, and this one, so much better."

This heartwarming and raucous piece puts loving focus on the community surrounding Portland Stage, and is the perfect fit to start the company's 50th season. *Saint Dad* pokes fun at our instinct to isolate, and hopes to welcome both new and seasoned audiences to this momentous year of theater.



LIAM CRAIG (AEA) AND JENNY WOODWARD AT THE TABLE READ FOR *SAINT DAD*. PHOTO BY JAMES A. HADLEY.

About the Characters

by Alex Oleksy



Name: Jenny Woodward

Character: Suzanne Casey

Youngest daughter of the Casey family. Left Maine to become an English professor in Boston. Stubborn and driven, and willing to do whatever it takes for her father, despite their rocky relationship.



Name: Liam Craig (AEA)

Character: Bud Casey

Middle child of the Casey family. Laid-off machine tender. Healing from heartbreak and unemployment, which has jaded him to Leona and her renovation of the camp.



Name: Moira Driscoll (AEA)

Character: Denise Thibodeau

Oldest daughter of the Casey family. Laid-off machine tender. The peacekeeper (and caretaker) of the siblings, she tries to soften Suzanne's strong will and Bud's pride.



Name: Pilar Witherspoon

Character: Leona Williams

The new owner of the Caseys' former camp. Corporate communications director. Career-driven to a fault, she bought the home for a chance to escape her divorce and troublesome relationship with her daughter, Thomasina.



Name: Emily Upton

Character: Thomasina Williams

Leona's college-aged daughter, an aspiring author. Rebellious and creative, always ready to make a scene to prove her point.



Name: Patrick O'Brien

Character: Chummy O'Brien

Longtime Maine resident and friend of the Casey family. A good Samaritan.

Pre-Show Activities

by Ellis Collier & Ellery Kenyon

1. Search "Picture of a Room" on google images and choose one of them. Create a character who might live in that room, based on what you see? Describe that person. What about the room led you to make the character the way you did?
2. Think about changes that have happened in your community. Can you remember a business closing down? What took its place? Talk to your caregiver. What changes have they noticed? Are there any businesses that aren't around anymore that they miss?
3. Read the "Getting Out" article (pg 18) and discuss: do you plan to stay in Maine? Do you want to leave? What reasons do you have for feeling one way or the other?
4. Research: How does someone become a saint? What are the steps and requirements? What is a patron saint? Try to find the Saint with your favorite surprising area of patronage. How did they become the patron saint of that domain?
5. Read the "Vacationland" article (pg 16) and then find a recent news article that connects back to the housing crisis. What are people doing to help?



Post-Show Activities

by Ellis Collier & Ellery Kenyon

1. How did you notice the staging (set, furniture, costumes) change throughout the play? What did that tell you about the characters? What do you think the playwright was trying to convey?
2. Each character in the play has a unique relationship with religion. What were the differences you noticed? What moments in the play led you to these conclusions?
3. Suzanne says about this generation's students, "They were so certain of their place in the world... I mean how does that happen? It's like they're bred to be certain." What do you hear adults say about your generation of students? Do you agree with what they think? How would you describe your generation?
4. Near the end of the play, each of the characters makes a promise. What promise would you make to yourself? Write it down and keep it somewhere safe to remember.
5. There are characters that are talked about in the play that never appear on stage. Why did the playwright make that choice? How does that make you feel about those characters and their relationships?

An Interview with the Director Sally Wood and Playwright Monica Wood

Edited for Length and Clarity by Alex Oleksy

Assistant Director and Dramaturg Alex Oleksy sat down with the creative team of Saint Dad for a "Playwright Happy Hour" to sip on a 'chewy cab' and chat about the creation of this Made in Maine play, which is the duo's third collaboration at Portland Stage.

Alex Oleksy (AO): *To start things off, Monica, what inspired you to tell the story of Saint Dad right now?*

Monica Wood (MW): Well, I didn't tell it right now. I've been working on [*Saint Dad*] for several years off and on. In fact, I actually started this play before I wrote *The Half-Light*. But then it was a big drought. I wrote that, and I actually wrote another book, and then I came back to it about a year and a half ago, but I didn't know where to go with it. But Portland Stage is kind of my artistic home. So I knocked on the usual doors and wound up with the literary manager Todd Brian Backus, who is a really good dramaturg. And he read the script for me, when all I had was Act One, and it went nowhere. So we talked about it a lot over a few months time, and then I took another crack at it. And this is what it is now. That's before Sally got her mitts on it.

AO: *Both of you are longtime collaborators with Portland Stage, what about this theater community keeps bringing you back?*

Sally Wood (SW): It's just such a great place to be, especially with new work because



MONICA WOOD AND SALLY WOOD. PHOTO BY LAUREN KENNEDY.

with the Little Festival [of the Unexpected] often being the jumping off point for plays, it's remarkable to see where they begin, and where they go after that. I always feel like we're in the middle of the process. We will have this production, but then based off of this production, who knows how it will morph and what it will turn into. But Anita [Stewart] has always loved new work, and especially locally sourced.

MW: I'm like a turnip.

SW: She's like a turnip. So I often think of Monica as my favorite turnip. But no, there's a real commitment to [locally sourced new work]. And that matters, I think, so that Monica can feel safe enough to come to Todd with something that's halfway done. And say 'here, is this something?' You can't do that everywhere. Sometimes you feel like you have to really have the whole thing all figured out and perfected. And this is just not the case here. We're allowed to be a little messy. Good thing. Darn good thing.

AO: *What brings you two back together as collaborators?*

MW: I just love Sally to bits. She's made both of my other plays, and this one, so much better. She's really easy to work with. She pushes really hard, very hard. I mean, sometimes it's really hard. But she doesn't have an ego about it. I find it easy to push back to her and to ask questions, and I know she's up for anything. She's just the best.

SW: You're the best. We're the Wood girls, so even though we're not related, we're related by art. When you've worked with somebody a few times, then you really start to have a shorthand with each other. And it's great because Monica is not afraid to tell me 'that is not a good idea.' To disagree generously. Everyone needs to take moments like that. But it's all about if you can disagree generously and just realize that everybody has the same desire, which is to tell this really great story.



EMILY UPTON AS THOMASINA AND PILAR WITHERSPOON (AEA) AS LEONA AT THE FIRST READ THROUGH OF SAINT DAD.
PHOTO BY JAMES A. HADLEY.

AO: What has excited both of you the most about getting this play on its feet?

SW: I think what has surprised me the most would be how heartfelt the play is, and it's funny. What's remarkable about this play is that if you have humor, that's your way into so many other things. I've been really surprised by how moved I have felt at several different moments. And not it's really fun because all of a sudden, my breath kind of gets taken away. And I'm like, 'oh wow, I am deep into this right now.'

MW: From a writer's point of view, there's something really difficult, but also so poignant, at the point when I realized the characters have completely moved out of my head. They will live in the bodies of these people I didn't even know a few weeks ago. and now they own these characters forever. I create them to a certain extent, but they don't really arrive until the actors get a hold of them. They teach me everyday things that I didn't know about the characters I wrote.

AO: Saint Dad grapples with how our home can change over time, whether we like it or not. What changes have you witnessed in Maine while you've lived here?

MW: Well, at this point, I have two hometowns. One is Mexico, Maine, which is where I was born and raised and lived till I was a young adult. And then Portland, which is where I moved to from there. So, you know, my original hometown is,

you know, as a middle town, and when I was a child, Rumford and Mexico had the highest per capita income in the state of Maine. And then I've been in Portland since 1977. When we moved here, my husband and I, it was a gritty waterfront town, and young people lived on Munjoy Hill. Our apartment was \$168 a month. The apartment building right next door to [our old] building, just listed a condo for \$3.45 million. So to say I have witnessed a lot of change in this town is a gross understatement. And part of it makes me very angry. People I know whose kids grew up here can't live here. And I think that should be the bar for a thriving city: if you grow up there, you can afford to live there. But that is simply not the case here. And we're not the only ones obviously, it's going on all over America.

SW: I think a counterpoint to that is yes, this should be a place where your kid should be able to live. But I also love the fact that in our own individual stories, when it comes time for us to sell, what are our priorities? Is it community? [Am I] gonna sell to the people who I feel like will honor the space, or do we sell to the highest bidder? I think when we get really quiet about that, sometimes the answer isn't so great.

Want to hear the extended interview? Give a listen to the PlayNotes Podcast! Listen now on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.



MONICA AT THE FIRST READ THROUGH OF SAINT DAD.
PHOTO BY JAMES A. HADLEY.

Upta Camp

by Alex Oleksy



CAMP CULTURE HAS PERSISTED IN MAINE FOR GENERATIONS

Before Leona's complete transformation of the Casey family camp, Denise, Bud, and Suzanne spent countless summers going "upta camp," participating in the century-long tradition of exploring the outdoors with family. Pre-pandemic, the coast and the woods of Maine were an economically-sound vacation site, meaning that families could own land or camps for generations. As yearly trips became a habit for grandparents, parents, and children, the state developed a strong community of native Mainers returning to the outdoors year after year.

Unlike the expensive "reno" at the heart of *Saint Dad*, going upta camp meant staying in a log cabin or a simple home with unfinished rooms, sometimes uninsulated or without plumbing: a far reach from the "glamping" (glamorous camping) many associate with out-of-towners vacationing in the state. "Roughing it" in the cabin keeps campers in touch with nature while allowing families to maintain low vacation costs, even during economic recessions, ensuring the tradition can continue no matter what. Great-grandparents that began fishing on the coast at the start of the 20th century could keep their camp through the Great Depression and two World Wars. They could pass it down to their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who could maintain it through the 2008 recession.

Unfortunately, the camp culture of native Mainers has dwindled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak incited massive land grabs along the coast of Maine by wealthy transplants, leading to similar price increases in urban centers as well. Harpswell, a coastal town with a population just over 5,000, recently held a community event to discuss the area's lack of financial accessibility. Residents frequently voiced concerns about antisocial new residents who had little interest in maintaining the communities they entered; they were instead focused on renovating their secluded vacation homes. Harpswell inhabitants also worried about the longevity of economic diversity in the area as camp renovations and rising costs began to push locals from their own cabins.

Leona's "reno" of the Casey camp in *Saint Dad* highlights the continual shift in population of Maine residents over recent years. Despite these transformations, native Mainers still continue to go "upta camp" summer after summer, maintaining generational traditions even while facing transformational times.

Saints Cited

by Julia Jennings

In Saint Dad, we watch the characters spar over the significance of various saints of the Catholic Church following Suzanne's return to the faith. To help readers follow along with the discourse, here's a quick roadmap for the saints of Saint Dad.

Saint Barbara was born to a wealthy pagan named Dioscorus, who locked her away in a high tower after the death of her mother, in order to protect her from the world. While locked in the tower, Barbara secretly became Christian, dedicating her life to God. Her father granted her freedom, hoping this would sway her from her faith, but Barbara was instead baptized in Alexandria, and returned to her father's home to perform miracles in their bathhouse. When her father discovered this, he beat and starved Barbara, but she refused to renounce her faith and was eventually condemned to beheading by her father.

Saint Paul is known as one of the most significant saints, the patron saint of missionaries, evangelists, writers, and public workers. Paul was a Roman Pharisee who originally presided over Christian persecutions, but was converted when he experienced a strong vision on the road to Damascus, supposedly after having been thrown from his horse. He was thereafter baptized and traveled the world, converting people to Christianity and establishing several churches. On his travels, he wrote letters to other Christians with advice on how to live. Many of those letters later became part of the Bible. Paul was twice imprisoned for preaching in Rome and was eventually beheaded by Emperor Nero.

Saint Olga, known colloquially as the patron saint of vengeance, is also the patron saint of widows and converts. Olga was the widow of Igor, Prince of Kyiv, and she herself became ruler of Kyiv c. 945–964 CE after

Igor was assassinated by his subjects. In retaliation, Olga had several of these subjects scalded to death, and killed hundreds of members of their tribe. Olga was baptized in Constantinople, and while her efforts to convert Kyiv to Christianity were thwarted by her son, they were later embraced by her grandson who led the transition to Christianity in Kyiv.

Saint Mary, or the Virgin Mary, famously mother of Jesus and wife of Saint Joseph, is known for the conception and delivery of Jesus, as well as observing his later crucifixion at the cross. Mary is also known for her assumption to heaven, as mentioned in Saint Dad—her body is believed to have been assumed to heaven to be reunited with her soul, rather than decaying as it naturally would. Assumption Day is still observed in many countries on August 15.



SAINT MARY

A Literary Life

by Jessi Stier

In Saint Dad, many characters express how literature and reading have influenced their lives in both direct and subtle ways. To keep up with all of the literary allusions, we've put together a little breakdown for you.

Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life is a novel of eight installments published between 1871 and 1872. It was written by the English author Mary Ann Evans, who wrote under the pseudonym George Eliot. She used a pen name to ensure her fiction was judged separately from her previous works, and to evade the stereotype that women's writing was limited to romance. She believed her work would be taken more seriously if it appeared to be written by a man. The novel is set in Middlemarch, a fictional middle-class English Midlands town. It is a work of realism, and is a study of multiple classes of society - from gentry and clergy to farmers and laborers. Additional topics include the status of women, marriage, religion, political reform, and education. The novel also features historical

events such as the 1832 Reform Act, the establishment of early railways, and the rule of King William IV. The main focus, however, centers around the unfortunate marriages of its two principal characters, Dorothea Brooke & Tertius Lydgate.

Mary Ann: The Evolving Religious Paradigm in the Novels of George Eliot is Suzanne's book written about Mary Ann Evans in *Saint Dad*. Given the title, we can infer that the book is likely about how Evans' interpretation of religion changes throughout her novels. She was raised to be a passionately religious Christian, but later came to oppose Christianity. Furthermore, while she believed that morality could fill the void of the absence of religion, she struggled with her personal character.

"I want to write with insight and empathy about the human condition, but honestly I'm not that great of a person." - **Thomasina, Scene 2**

Maya Angelou was a preeminent Black poet, memoirist, and actress whose several volumes of autobiography explore the themes of economic, racial, and sexual oppression. Her work *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), gained critical acclaim and a National Book Award nomination. She is also well known for her third volume of poetry *And Still I Rise*, which contained 32 short poems, divided into three parts. The poems' themes focus on a hopeful determination to rise above difficulty and discouragement, and on many of the same topics as Angelou's autobiographies. Two of her most well-known and popular poems "Phenomenal Woman" and "Still I Rise" are found in this book. She speaks for her race and gender in many of the poems, and emphasizes the resiliency of her community. Another well known poem by Angelou is "On the Pulse of Morning", which she composed and recited for the 1993 inauguration of the US President Bill Clinton. She was awarded the National Medal of Arts (2000) and the Presidential Medal of



AUTHOR TONI MORRISON

Freedom (2010). She also won three Grammy Awards for her spoken-word albums (1993, 1995, and 2002).

"This isn't a stock-market glitch, Mom, this is my life. There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. Maya Angelou said that." - **Thomasina, Scene 3**

Toni Morrison was a prolific Nobel Prize- and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, editor and professor. Her novels are largely based around Black characters, and are known for their epic themes and poetic language. Her best known works include *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, *Love*, and *A Mercy*. Morrison has also earned a variety of accolades and honorary degrees, and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012.

"This isn't it. What I have so far is on the mud-shrouded corpse of my phone, but I found this in Olivia's car. I'm starting over, Old School. Toni Morrison wrote by hand. I want to be loyal to my craft." - **Thomasina, Scene 2**

Great American Novel (sometimes abbreviated as GAN) is the term for a novel that generally embodies and examines the essence and character of the United States. The term was created by John William De Forest in an 1868 essay of the same name in which he defined the concept as "the picture of the ordinary emotions and manners of American existence." He further called for realism in American fiction, but said it was hard to achieve because American society was "changing too rapidly to be comprehended as a whole." He also noted that the Great American Novel had most likely not been written yet. The following books are generally considered by literary critics to reflect the Great American Novel: *Moby-Dick* (1851), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and *Gone With The Wind* (1936).

"What do you have to write about? You're eighteen. [...] Ohhh, I see. Well, the subject of your Great American Novel is still your mother, and your mother did not raise a quitter."
- **Leona, Scene 3**

Shakespeare was English playwright and poet of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries who is generally considered one of the greatest writers of all time. His plays include *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Tempest*, and *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare also wrote more than 150 sonnets. Many familiar sayings and quotations come from his works.

Thomasina: "Well, he has a way with words, I kinda fell in love with that. He called me his siren... 'Love is a smoke, made with the fume of sighs.'"

Bud: "Aw, for chrissake."

Thomasina: "Isn't that gorgeous?"

Suzanne: "Shakespeare thought so." - **Scene 2**

"Love is a smoke, made with the fume of sighs": This is a quote from Act 1, Scene 1 of *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. Romeo is pining after someone who doesn't love him back, and is detailing the many ways love can manifest as madness.

Hamlet: The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, often shortened to *Hamlet*, is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare sometime between 1599 and 1601. The play is set in Denmark, and details Prince Hamlet's pursuit of revenge against his uncle, Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet's mother.

Faulkner was American writer whose works *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930) explore the decay of older Southern culture. His books depicted the imaginary Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi. In 1949, he won the Nobel Prize for literature.

"Lemme guess: He won a National Book Award 25 years ago, tears up talking about Faulkner, five stars on rate-my-professor dot com."

- **Suzanne, Scene 2**

Vacationland & Maine's Housing Crisis

by Julia Jennings

The opening of *Saint Dad* finds the Casey siblings at a crossroads, having recently sold their family camp to an affluent businesswoman from Boston, and now facing pushback from friends and neighbors as families all around the lake follow suit, selling homes to out-of-towners who can overpay. This play serves as a very apt portrait of the current conflicts plaguing the Maine housing market, nodding to gentrification and the statewide housing crisis.

Maine has been colloquially known as “Vacationland” since as early as the 1890s, a nickname coined by the Maine Central Railroad as the coast began to attract wealthy and prominent summer residents. Maine’s long and illustrious history as a tourist destination (tourism remains the state’s largest industry today) carries weighty implications in the modern realities of the statewide housing crisis.

The state of Maine is known to hold the highest percentage of vacation homes in the country (over 19% of Maine housing stock in 2020, according to the *Portland Press Herald*). With the rise of platforms such as Airbnb and VRBO, short-term rentals have also been exploding over the market. *The Bangor Daily News* estimates that 72% of Maine’s vacant housing units are currently being operated for seasonal or occasional use as vacation homes. This influx of tourists and vacationers has the effect of pricing out middle- and working-



MAINE HAS LONG BEEN A SOUGHT-AFTER VACATION DESTINATION.

class Mainers while vacation homes sit empty for months at a time. Many rental owners, however, point to the larger housing crisis, in which short-term rentals seem to only be a small problem.

Following decades of widening income inequality across the state, the current number of unhoused people in Maine is the highest it has ever been. Maine is estimated to need an additional 40,000 affordable units. The housing market is lacking inventory, a result of prolonged production disruption caused by the 2008 recession, as well as supply chain issues and an aging construction workforce.

This crisis has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as the United States experienced mass migration from urban centers to less populated areas such as Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire. Approximately one-third of buyers and half of mortgage inquiries in the current Maine housing market are coming from out of state. Such high demand for limited housing resources has led to the current dramatic increases in housing costs. The median sales price for a home in Cumberland County saw an increase from \$380,125 in September 2020 to \$500,625 in August 2023. In nearly every Maine county, the average cost of a house is unaffordable given the average household income.



THE UNHOUSED POPULATION OF PORTLAND FACES DIRE CIRCUMSTANCES.



THE HISTORIC PEJEPSCOT PAPER COMPANY IN TOPSHAM, MAINE

Here in Portland, the crisis is especially visible. In May of this year, the city of Portland cleared an encampment of nearly 150 people living in tents along the Bayside Trail. According to the January census, there are over 4,200 people living in Maine who are currently unhoused. Portland has simultaneously welcomed over 1,000 asylum seekers this year, and the city does not currently have the infrastructure to provide enough resources for all those needing shelter. Portland already houses approximately 1,200 people each night across three different shelters and hotels. This is not unique to Portland; all over the state, tent cities have been popping up as shelters are continually maxed out.

Of course, steps are being taken to mitigate the crisis. In July of this year, Governor Janet Mills signed a bill that allocated an additional \$100 million to address the housing shortage. This follows a \$43 million infusion for emergency housing programs passed by the state legislature last winter. Funds are allocated through MaineHousing to housing subsidy programs such as the Rural Affordable Rental Housing Program and the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit Program, aimed at building affordable units and reserving units for low-income renters.

The Caseys, of course, serve as just one example of how the Maine housing crisis is affecting residents. And while the Caseys' situation may not be as dire as those currently without housing, the play demonstrates how events such as mill layoffs and automation are also forcing families to make difficult choices in the high-stakes market. Maine must grapple with the many implications of its contradictory identity as a charming vacation destination and a refuge for asylum seekers and the unsheltered, while also caring for its aging population of long-term residents. Can it do both, providing for its residents in need while also sustaining the tourism industry that has so integrally shaped the state's identity? Can our state make good on its promise of "The Way Life Should Be"?

Getting Out:

The Push for Young Mainers to Leave While They Can

by Jessi Stier



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FINDING IT DIFFICULT TO STAY IN MAINE.

As someone who just relocated to Maine a few weeks ago, I was immediately in awe of how much the state has to offer: bustling cities, natural beauty, and—from my first impression—a visible presence of young people. On walks with the apprentice company, we are constantly encountering other young folks on the street, in coffee shops, in thrift stores, and more. Before moving, I was aware that Maine featured a predominantly older demographic—and I do recognize that by being an urban area, Portland is an exception to that fact. However, after researching further, I discovered that to Maine's young population, cities like Portland are merely a drop in the bucket toward the motivation to stay in-state. In fact, many young people are not enticed by the idea of living in Maine long-term whatsoever. In *Saint Dad*, we see the Casey family grapple with this choice of many of their friends and neighbors to move out of state. The looming lack of job opportunities, financial stability, and cultural/social initiatives statewide are pushing young people to move out of Maine while they can—having a positive effect on their personal longevity, but a negative impact on the longevity of Maine.

In a study done by the University of Maine, one-third of graduating seniors cited a lack of jobs in Maine as a significant reason to leave

the state. Further, when asked about their overall confidence in the strength of Maine's economy to provide "a secure future for new college graduates," 75% of the seniors said Maine could not offer them the necessary aspects of life to be successful and feel financially stable. Statistics like this have caused Maine to fall victim to "brain drain," a term that defines the trend of talented individuals leaving their rural hometowns and states for larger US cities in order to better pursue jobs in their chosen fields. In *Saint Dad*, for example, Suzanne leaves Maine to work at a college outside of Boston, a very common city for Mainers to relocate to—still nearby, but with seemingly greater opportunities for employment.

Brain drain has led to a massive labor shortage in Maine, throughout the 18–25 demographic and beyond. To this point, labor advocacy network Maine SPARK estimates Maine needs to attract 158,000 more workers by 2025 in order for the job market to be in good standing, as well as to counteract the effects of an aging population, as Maine is currently experiencing more deaths than births! In addition to attracting more young workers, Maine also needs to retain as many as possible to function at its best. As a result, the state has worked to put various initiatives in place to fight against brain drain and labor gaps, including "Opportunity Maine," a tax credit program administered by the Maine Revenue Service. Through Opportunity Maine, if students choose to live and work in Maine post-grad, their student loan payments can be reimbursed.

However, offsetting loans is not enough to persuade young folks to stay. If they decide to live in Maine long-term and pursue home ownership, they will face the additional hurdle of steep taxes. Maine carries a tax burden of 12.40%, ranking as ninth highest in the US. In *Saint Dad*, the Ellises are the perfect example of a family affected by Maine's heavy taxation. The Caseys mention that their neighbors, the Ellises, sold their camp in Maine, "cashed

out,” and moved to Florida to pursue greater financial stability. Florida has one of the lowest tax burdens in the country at 6.3%. As demonstrated by the Ellises’ move, the combination of heavy taxation and lack of job opportunities does not make Maine a desirable place for those who want to build and sustain a financial foundation.

Further, many young people are dissatisfied with Maine’s inability to foster a diverse, multi-cultural environment that represents their values. According to the 2020 census, Maine was 93.9% White, 2% Black, 1.4% Asian, and 2.1% Latino. Having such a predominantly White population does not suggest a promising future for many young Mainers, who long to live alongside people of varied backgrounds, lifestyles, and beliefs. In a recent youth migration study, 40% of first-year students at UMaine cited a lack of cultural experiences and diversity as reasons they would likely leave the state. Since young people are often a source of new social initiatives and ideas, their continued departure will only perpetuate a lack of new, cutting-edge experiences for Mainers—creating an unfortunate impact on the state as a whole.

While not directly related to expanding culture, there have also been organizational initiatives to keep young people in Maine by connecting them to “quintessential Maine experiences” (exploring the outdoors, aquatic experiences, engaging with wildlife, etc) to create a greater awareness of the state’s natural resources. One example of this is Realize Maine Network, a coalition of organizations whose goal is to market the state as enticingly as possible to young adults to encourage them to live and work in Maine through social, civic, and career activities. Part of the organization’s programming includes an internship program that connects young folks with potential employers, as well as demonstrating that there are opportunities for meaningful leisure in the state. As such, participants engage in a series of guided nature activities, including whitewater rafting and hiking. In addition to programming catered to building Maine’s workforce, the Maine Development Foundation (who created Realize Maine) has also developed programming dedicated to creating a stronger economy in Maine through the use

of the state’s best assets. To this point, the Maine Development Foundation has released the Maine Forest Opportunity Roadmap, a collaborative effort with the forest product industry and community stakeholders to grow

Maine’s \$8-billion, 30,000-job forest economy to \$12 billion by 2025.



YOUNG PEOPLE HIKING.

Though many of these initiatives are positive and have improved the experiences of young folks in Maine, they have not been enough to majorly influence the outflow of talent. Furthermore, according to Catherine Reilly, Maine’s former state economist, these initiatives cannot undo an innately pessimistic attitude about youth lifestyle in the state, perpetuated by rhetoric in Maine schools and across the media. “It’s the way community leaders, politicians, and parents speak. It’s the headlines in the newspapers,” she says. “When young people in Maine hear that all young people leave, that Maine isn’t a good place to start a career, that they should go elsewhere for college—if they hear those messages constantly as they’re growing up then those messages will become a self-fulfilling prophecy and they will act on them.” Reilly’s words demonstrate that the departure of young Mainers is cyclical, and influenced by so many other factors, including personal perceptions of their role in Maine. Therefore, breaking this cycle has to start from within Maine itself: its values, messaging, and outlook.

Recommended Resources

by Editors

Read (books, plays, and more):

Papermaker by Monica Wood

Ernie's Arc by Monica Wood

Middlemarch, A Study of Provincial Life by Mary Ann Evans

The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou

Watch:

Beloved by Toni Morrison, directed by Jonathan Demme

Get Involved:

Realize Maine Network, www.mdf.org/leadership-development/realize-maine-network/

Maine Forest Opportunity Roadmap, <https://formaine.org>

Maine State Housing Authority, www.mainehousing.org/programs-services

Maine Affordable Housing Coalition, <https://mainehousingcoalition.org/>

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Portland Stage Company

Education Programs

Student Matinee Series

The Portland Stage Student Matinee Program provides students with discounted tickets for student matinees. Following the performance, students participate in a conversation with the cast and crew, which helps them gain awareness of the creative process and encourages them to think critically about the themes and messages of the play.

Play Me a Story

Experience the fun and magic of theater on Saturday mornings with Play Me a Story! Ages 4 – 10 enjoy a performance of children’s stories followed by an interactive acting workshop with Portland Stage’s Education Artists for \$15. Sign up for the month and save or pick individual days that work for you. Build literacy, encourage creativity and spark dramatic dreams!

Shakespeare Teen Company

In April and May of 2024, students will come together as an ensemble to create a fully-staged production of Shakespeare’s Hamlet in Portland Stage’s studio theater. Participants in grades 7-12 take on a variety of roles including acting, costume design, marketing, and more!

Vacation and Summer Camps

Dive into theater for five exciting days while on your school breaks! Our theater camps immerse participants in all aspects of theater, culminating in an open studio performance for friends and family at the end of the week! Camps are taught by professional actors, directors, and artisans. Students are invited to think imaginatively, critically, and creatively in an environment of inclusivity and safe play.

PLAY Program

An interactive dramatic reading and acting workshop tour for elementary school students in grades pre-k through 5. Professional education artists perform children’s literature and poetry and then involve students directly in classroom workshops based on the stories. Artists actively engage students in in small group workshop using their bodies, voices, and imaginations to build understanding of the text while bringing the stories and characters to life. PLAY helps develop literacy and reading fluency, character recall, understanding of themes, social emotional skills, physical storytelling, and vocal characterization. The program also comes with a comprehensive Resource Guide filled with information and activities based on the books and poems.

Directors Lab

Professional actors perform a 50-minute adaptation of a Shakespeare play, followed by a talkback. In 2024 we will be touring *Much Ado About Nothing* to middle and high schools. After the performance, students engage directly with the text in an interactive workshop with the actors and creative team. In these workshops, students practice effective communication, creative collaboration, rhetoric, and critical analysis. The program also comes with a comprehensive Resource Guide filled with information and resources about the play we are focusing on. Directors Lab puts Shakespeare’s language into the hands and mouths of the students, empowering them to be the artists, directors, and ensemble with the power to interpret the text and produce meaning.

Portland Stage Company

Anita Stewart *Artistic Director*
Martin Lodish *Managing Director*

Artistic & Production Staff

Todd Brian Backus *Literary Manager*
Jacob Coombs *Associate Technical Director*
Aisling Dono *Education Assistant*
Ted Gallant *Technical Director*
Myles C. Hatch *Stage Manager*
Meg Lydon *Stage Manager*
Mary Lana Rice *Production Manager & Lighting Supervisor*
Julianne Shea *Education Administrator*
Seth Asa Sengel *Asst. Production Manager & Sound Supervisor*
Michael Dix Thomas *Education Director*
Susan Thomas *Costume Shop Manager*

Administrative Staff

Paul Ainsworth *Business Manager*
Beka Bryer *Front of House Associate*
Chris DeFilipp *House Manager*
Allison Fry *Executive Assistant*
Beth Given *Development Director*
Lindsey Higgins *Development Associate*
Erin Elizabeth *Marketing Director*
James A. Hadley *Assistant Marketing Director*
Jennifer London *Company Manager*
Renee Myhaver *Assistant Box Office Manager*
Donald Smith *Audience Services Manager*
Madeleine St. Germain *Front of House Associate*
Adam Thibodeau *House Manager*
Shannon Wade *Front of House Associate*

Apprentice Company

Katie Barnes *Stage Management Apprentice*
Ellis Collier *Education Apprentice*
Lucie Green *Company Management Apprentice*
Julia Jennings *Directing & Dramaturgy Apprentice*
Ellery Kenyon *Education Apprentice*
Isee Martine *Lighting & Sound Apprentice*
Claire Lowe, *Electrics Apprentice*
Alex Oleksy *Directing & Dramaturgy Apprentice*
Elizabeth Sarsfield *Stage Management Apprentice*
Jessi Stier *Directing & Dramaturgy Apprentice*
Crow Traphagen *Costumes Apprentice*
Elena Truman *Costumes Apprentice*

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