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Bruce Denny

- *Johnno's Story*

A one act play - drama

Running Time: approx. 40 minutes

Period: Late 1980s

Synopsis:

Johnno is nearing retirement, however finds himself facing retrenchment after years of loyalty due to the plans of the 'new company'.

Based on a true story.

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About the Playwright: Bruce Denny



bio

About the Play:

Johnno's Story is based on a true story and set in the late 1980s, however is as relevant today as it was then. *Johnno's Story* was first produced at The Brookman St Theatre home of the Goldfields Repertory Club (1931) Inc in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia in 2005 and was entered into the ITA State One Act Drama Festival held at Roleystone Theatre. Adjudicated by Jenny Davis, this show won an award for Excellent Set and Abigail Ayers received the Peter Kemeney Encouragement Award for her performance. Playwright Bruce Denny received an Adjudicator's Certificate for Inspiring Play Writing.

In 2007 *Johnno's Story* performed at the Garrick Theatre Club in Guildford, Western Australia and was directed by Melanie DeCull. Again the show was entered into the ITA State One Act Drama Festival, adjudicated by Ingle Knight and Rebecca Wilson received Best Supporting Actress.

The original cast in 2005 at Goldfields Rep Club:

Greg Langtree as Johnno
Agnes Kissane and Maree Barnfield as May
Abigail Ayers as Terri
Natasha Graham as Julie
John Taylor as Pete

The cast in 2007 at Garrick Theatre Club:

Damien Bourke as Johnno
Fran Bourke as May
Rebecca Wilson as Terri
Shannon Louis as Julie
Murray Jackson as Pete

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"Johnno's Story"

a one act drama by Bruce Denny

Cast in order of appearance:

Johnno Mid to late 50s - working class, proud, old fashioned family man.
Pete Mid 30s, workmate, served his apprenticeship with Johnno as his Tradesman.
Terri Early 20s Johnno's daughter, university student, fit.
May Johnno's wife, not rough or daggy reads *Woman's Weekly* between games at bingo.
Julie Pete's wife – mid to late 20s, fit, self focussed.

Set in late 1980's.

- contains some strong language.

Approx. running time – 40 minutes.

Johnno's Story is based on a true story and set in the late 1980's. Poor management has led a company into difficulties, leading to its sale to a rival company. Many good tradesmen and employees with decades of loyal service are thrown into unemployment overnight, while the General Manager transfers to the new company. Ironically, it was the General Manager who had caused the problem and it was the workers who paid the price. These are Master Tradesmen in their 50s and 60s who have no real prospects to look forward to and a very slim chance of regaining suitable employment (in the late 1980's retraining wasn't available or an option for them). The 'Suits' continue to live the high life while there are disastrous consequences for many of the workers.

The play opens in the kitchen of Johnno and May's ex Housing Commission home. With basic table, chairs, telephone, kettle etc. A full set may be used if desired. Johnno is going crook at his portable radio after yet another one of his horses loses. He drains his glass of beer and looks at the empty bottle.

Johnno Flaming favourites, best bets. You mongrels couldn't tip a winner in a one horse race. Crooked, the whole bloody lot of you.

(There is a knock on the back door,)

Johnno Come in Pete.

(Pete enters carrying two bottles of beer, and proceeds to open one.)

Pete How'd ya know it was me?

Johnno Because you'd be the only person that would visit this late, and knock.

Pete Sounds like you're losing again.

(Pete proceeds to fill his and Johnno's glasses.)

Johnno Thanks mate. How are ya?

(Pete indicates to the back verandah)

Pete Not too bad, but the beer fridge is locked.

Johnno The keys are on the hook.

Pete Why put the lock on when you're using it?

Johnno Don't trust the neighbors..... The keys are on the hook.

Pete Fair go, I'm your neighbour, the padlock I can understand, but why did you screw the bloody thing to the floor?

Johnno Because you've got a trolley!

Pete Yeah right, thanks mate.

Johnno Now shush up for a minute, I got a hot tip from Ginger for the next race.

Pete It has got me stuffed why. You never put much on.

Johnno Just proving me system that's all... You just wait... I'll be retired and you'll still be working. You might even get my job, if I'm generous enough. Now shut up, I want to listen.

(He turns the radio up louder, just in time to hear that his horse has been scratched by the Stewards. Pete has a bit of a laugh. Johnno turns the radio off in disgust and has a drink)

Pete What happened? I suppose I'm not going to become Foreman after all.

Johnno Bloody mongrels! The bastards are all crooked I tell ya. To hell with them anyway. Why are you here? Weren't you going to the pub?

Pete Been already, not much happening there. Off pay week and all, just Stringer and Rowdy from the stores. Besides I told Julie that I wouldn't spend all night there.

Johnno So you gonna drink here... instead of the pub, you should have brought more then.

Pete I'm just staying for a couple that's all. Julie's still at netball and I've got to work tomorrow. It's got me blowed all the overtime lately. Why do you reckon they are pushing so hard to get that Government order finished? It's way ahead of schedule. The afternoon shift should finish stage one today.

Johnno What do you care what the schedule is? That's a management problem.

Pete Why the secrecy? It isn't a defence contract, anyway Alice told me last week.

Johnno *Alice told you?* She's no right to do that, I'm Foreman and I know what needs to be done.

(Pete knows he has given Johnno a bit of a shock about Alice's gossip and rubs it in a bit more.)

Pete Yeah, well according to Alice they're working out redundancies. They're going through all the payroll files.

(Johnno is feeling uncomfortable about Alice's info being fed to Pete.)

Johnno Yeah, sure! What would she know? That doesn't prove anything. Anyway, after this tomorrow's race I'll be rolling in money and won't care what they do. Then you can sit back and weep.

Pete Where does May keep the tissues? I reckon you're gonna need them more than me. You never win. If those rumours about the lay-offs are true, we could all be at the races.

Johnno It's just a rumor. The place has got plenty of work; it's going to take six months to finish what we've got now. Why would they sack blokes when we're all going flat out as it is?

Pete Yeah but Alice gave me the info and she's never wrong.

Johnno Listen, nobody has said anything to me and I'm the Foreman.

Pete So?

Johnno So, if something is going to be changed or there are cut backs they tell me first.

Pete Ok then, who are all the suits wandering around, checking everything out?

Johnno I don't know, efficiency experts maybe?

Pete Fair go mate, they would tell you, if that's all they are.

Johnno Ask Alice, she seems to be telling you the gossip instead of me these days.

Pete And she said redundancies. Could be that we're all in for the chop.

Johnno Nah, they've got plenty of work
*(Terri, Johnno's daughter enters wearing her netball gear,
gets herself a glass and pours herself a beer.)*

Terri G'day what's happening? No don't tell me, let me guess, Dad hasn't had a winner yet and you *(indicating Pete)* have either been kicked out of the pub or you're broke. You two are so predictable. Mum will be back soon so you had better clean up your mess.

Johnno G'day honey, how'd you go this week? Win or lose?

Terri Lose? Nah, we killed them, I got one so and so a beaut with an elbow right where it hurts.

Johnno Why? What did she do?

Terri Him dad It's a mixed comp.

(Johnno and Pete both look at Terri then at each other and wince.)

Pete What are you doing playing against blokes?

Terri It's more social, and besides, you can flirt.

Johnno How do you flirt during a game of netball?

Terri Easy, men are so simple, my favorite is to hitch your skirt a bit higher and bend over a bit further ... it destroys their game. It's a handy maneuver, because it also works at the pub when we're playing pool afterwards.

(She leans over the table as if it were a pool table she is at the back of the table facing the audience. Pete discreetly leans back to have a perve. Johnno springs him)

Johnno For Christ's sake Terri, have some modesty will you. I'm your father and he's a pervert. (Looking at Pete) Oi, isn't it time you shot through?

Pete Fair go.... I haven't finished my beer yet. So what did this bloke do Terri? To deserve a whack to his... you know...

Terri Nuts.... He was perving on me. The creep.

(Johnno and Pete look at each other in confusion and a bit of shock)

Johnno You hitch up your skirt and flash your undies at him..... and he's not supposed to look?

Terri No... He's supposed to look.... He just shouldn't leer so obviously the bastard.

(Pete and Johnno now even look more confused.)

Johnno Have you ever thought about acting more like a lady?

Terri What do you mean lady?

Pete Oh... Oh now you're in trouble.

Terri You two should keep up with the times. Like the song said, "They are a changing".

Johnno That's a joke. Change is for the young, you have your nappy changed, then puberty changes you and after that first love changes you. From then on, it's downhill. Remember that Bowie song "Changes" turn to face the change he said... I've been going around in circles ever since.

Terri God! That's deep for you Dad. How many beers have you two scoffed?

Pete Don't look at me. I just got here and ... it may be time for me to go. Otherwise Julie will go crook at me.

Terri You don't need to rush off because of me. Julie was heading for the pub after the game. She was going to clean them up at pool... if you know what I mean.

Pete What. That'll be right... I am going.

Terri Don't cramp her style.

(Pete exits. "see you" Good-byes etc)

Johnno You shouldn't do that to him Terri. It's not fair.

Terri What do you mean?

Johnno You know what he's like, and anyway all he gets to see at home are the tracky dacks and curlers these days. By the way where's your Mum? If you tell me she's playing pool at the pub I'm out of here too.

Terri Nah. She's still at bingo, it doesn't work there. Anyways, what was that waffle about change, it sounded pretty deep. Are you ok? What's the prob?

Johnno Ah nothing really, same old same old. Still backing losing nags and still at the factory.

Terri You're Foreman now though.

Johnno These days I am not even a Foreman any more, they have redesignated it Shift Supervisor. They don't want to be seen as sexist.

Terri Cheer up Dad. It can't be that bad.

Johnno You reckon? You try working there since old man George's kids have taken over.

Terri Why don't you quit then?

Johnno And do what? The same dead end job... Somewhere else?

Terri I dunno? ... Just don't think of gambling for a living or we'll all starve.

Johnno God, don't you start.

Terri Picking winners have never been your strong point. So what's *really* bothering you now?

Johnno There are rumours about layoffs at the factory and there are a lot of bean counters walking around.

Terri Could be an upgrade or an audit?

Johnno Yeah, could be, but they normally tell me what's going on.

(May enters Johnno stands and Julie gives her a peck on the cheek, Hi mum etc)

May G'day, you two look serious, what's up?

Terri Nothing much. We were just having a chat, about Dad's work.

Johnno How'd you go love? Have a win this week?

May Don't be silly. I'm about as lucky as your horses. Who wants a cuppa? Terri?
(Looks at Johnno) I know you don't.

Johnno No thanks love, I'll just finish my beer and lock up the shed.

Terri I'll make the tea mum, you sit down.

(Terri goes to the kettle, has to shift a couple of empties.)

May Ta love, but don't worry. I don't really need another one, I had a couple at bingo. I just asked out of habit. So how did the netball go? Did ya win? *(May spies the empties)* What are those bottles doing there?

Johnno Oops sorry May. The way they play netball these days is a lot different to when you did.

May How? And John you can put those bottles outside. Where they belong.

Terri Tactics, that's all Mum. The strategy has changed that's all.

(Johnno has a smile and winks at Terri)

May So, what's wrong with that?

Johnno Nothing, I suppose, I'll let Terri explain her sports philosophy while I take out the empties.

(Johnno exits out back door to lock up the shed with bottles and key ring. May is starting to clean up.)

May What was he saying about work?

Terri He's not enjoying it and there are rumours of retrenchments.

May He's never enjoyed it.

Terri That's the problem I think, and now there are rumors about layoffs.

May Well in a couple of years we'll have the house paid off, then he can do something different. If there are layoffs it won't be him, he's been there more than twenty years.

Terri Yeah I suppose so.

May He's most probably just had a lousy day or backed lousy horses.

Terri Dad always backs lousy horses.

May True... it must have been a bad day.

Terri I'm not sure Mum, I think it's deeper than that

May Deep? Him?

Terri You might need to drag it out of him. I think Dad's worried about something.

May Drag what out of him? He's a man, whatever it is that's bugging him will be locked up inside.

Terri You should be able to find out.

May You can be married to a man for 25 years and know what they're thinking, most of the time. But you never really know their emotions. I reckon he's starting to feel his age that's all.

Terri I'm not that sure Mum, could he be going through a male "change of life" or something?

May No, women curse the fact that they do... and men curse the fact that they can't.

Terri What does that mean?

May Tomorrow I'll pack his crib and he'll catch the 6.30 bus as usual and at knock off, he will catch the bus home like he always has. Men don't go through a change of life, life changes around them. Terri when I met your Dad he didn't see himself as an old tradesman. He was going to have his own businessoh... and a racehorse. (*Johnno re-enters from the back door*)

Johnno Yeah, so, what are you two scheming? A new coaching manual?

May Terri tells me that you reckon there may be some retrenchments.

Johnno There are lots of suits wandering around at the moment and the rumor from Alice, *via Pete*, is that they are working out redundancy payments. Don't worry love, it will be last on first off. We'll be right.

Terri If that's right, what has got you so worried?

Johnno It's got me blowed why?

Terri Money! That's all that counts these days. That's why they're looking at redundancies.

May No, not with them Terri. That's been a family company for years and still is. Anyway you can get a Foreman job anywhere you wanted to.

Johnno The George's kids have taken over now, with all their degrees and stuff. Foreman's job somewhere else? Same job, someone else's machines, different coloured crib room! What do ya reckon May? Take the pay out, get a caravan and see the country? Or maybe some bright spark might like to create an Opportunities for Men's course at Tafe I could attend, or with you two an Assertiveness one might be more helpful.

May You'd better, keep working Johnno or I'll go mad. Having you at home under my feet would drive me crazy. And I have no wish to drive around the countryside listening to horse racing with you in a towelling hat. So, catch the bus tomorrow like you always have ... right.

(They all have a bit of a laugh at this.)

Terri You could do a washing machine or vacuum cleaner course, you know a "how to use one" type.

Johnno Couldn't do that Terri. Your Mum and I came to an agreement on that years ago didn't we May.

May *(laughing)* Yeah!

Terri What do you mean, what's so funny?

May You tell her, if you want to, I am going to take these shoes off.

(May Exits as Johnno says his line)

Johnno Fair go honey, I'm not sure if I should. She may be too young.

Terri Come on Dad, don't give me that bulldust. What's so funny?

Johnno Well Terri, if you have noticed, I never touch the washing machine and your mother never touches the lawn mower. It's a mutual agreement.

Terri Why? What for?

Johnno Once upon a time..., before you were born, we had only been married about six months I reckon. I came home rather late and the worse for wear one night.

Terri Oh yeah..., typical male... Come on.

Johnno Anyways, I was consigned to the couch in the lounge room. The next day at 7.30 AM there was cursing coming from the front yard. My head was killing me but I looked up over the windowsill and there was your mother trying to start the lawnmower... at that ungodly hour. She was huffing and puffing swearing and cursing like you wouldn't believe. I was starting to see the funny side until two Mormons rocked up on their push-bikes and asked her if she needed some help! The next thing I know is they have the dam mower going. My head is pounding and your mum is taking them out cool drinks and telling them what a pig I am. While they mowed the lawn!

Terri (laughing) Yeah, fair enough too!

Johnno A couple of months later it was your mothers turn to play up. She came staggering home, after a hen's party and flopped into bed... not the couch mind you, like I had to endure... So at 6.30 am I decided to do the washing. I got my work clothes, some "fancy" table cloths, shoved them into the Whirlpool along with my tee shirts. Anyway, somewhere during the spin cycle it got out of balance and started banging and thumping all around the laundry. This woke your poor Mum up... and she came lurching down the hallway, looking as sick as a dog, to find her brand new Whirlpool waltzing around the laundry. She came into the kitchen to give me a serve and I reminded her about the lawn-mowing escapade.

Terri You bugger.

Johnno So after that we decided that I wouldn't touch her Whirlpool if she left my Victor alone and that is why you are an only child...

Terri You're joking.

Johnno About the only child bit, yeah, but the rest is gospel... You know we never did see them again those Mormons.

Terri I'm not surprised. What other dirt do you have?

Johnno I don't ask you, what you get up to when you stagger home after a Friday night. You don't need to know what we did on some of our Friday nights. Fair enough.

Terri Mum does! She gives me that "*I'm your Mother*" look and says, well young lady what have you got to say for yourself

Johnno She would.... But do you tell her the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Terri No way! It might send her hair grey.

Johnno It is grey, has been for years. Five third world villages could have fed and educated their kids on what has been spent on your Mum's head.

(They are both enjoying the joke)

Terri Dad!... That's not nice. You're lucky she's not here or you'd cop it.

Johnno Don't I know it.

Terri I dye my hair sometimes.

Johnno Yeah, but that's because you want to change the colour. Your mum is doing it to hide her age...

(May re-enters)

May So, have you told Terri the story?

Terri Yeah, I always thought that my parents were the conservative types.

Johnno We are now, but once upon a time it was different, wasn't it May.

May Be very careful Johnno, your next sentence could be your last. Thankfully times have changed since then.

Johnno You reckon? On the surface maybe, but when you think about it we're doing the same squirrel in a drum routine that our parents did and their parents did before that.

May You are possibly, when I met you the entertainment was a few beers and the horses and it still is. You couldn't change if your life depended on it.

Johnno I reckon it's time for a change.

May Well you could start by giving up beer and gambling, how's that for a change?

Terri You could even try sitting at a different kitchen chair for dinner.

Johnno Very funny Terri, my beer and nags are my only joys left in life. How could I change the seating arrangements for dinner, your mum has always put my plate right here. The first meal we had, at this table, your mum plonked my plate right here and told me to sit. If I sat somewhere else I might go hungry.

May I am sure, I could work it out John, or you could do something radical like set the table if you want change.

Johnno Would I be allowed to change the seating May?

May If you wanted to, as long as you move closer to the back door.

Johnno I might go out and get my ear pierced and dye my hair. Might even run off with one of Terri's University mates for a wild weekend.

Terri Yeah right Dad, sorry to disappoint you, but none of my mates have told me that you appear in their fantasies. Although I could ask Bill, he seems to like his men a bit older. And he doesn't stop at the ear dad he could show you other places that men can have piercings.

May I'll do it! Get me a hot needle Terri, we will do it now.

Johnno OK, OK, I give up I'll even catch the early bus tomorrow.

May Good, that means I won't have to set your dinner out on the back verandah.

Terri And I won't have to tell my girlfriends to keep clear. I think we can still do your hair though.

Johnno No. It's all or nothing. The factory is sounding like the lesser of two evils.

(There is a knock at the back door, Pete calls out.)

Pete Hey Johnno, I've got something important to tell ya.

Johnno God what does he want at this hour? I wonder if Julie has kicked him out again? Come in Pete.

Terri Or maybe the Pubs burnt down

(Pete and Julie enter.)

Johnno What is it mate? G'day Julie

Julie Hello.

May & Terri Hi / hello

Pete Mick from the nightshift just rang me. They have stood them down! All the boys have been told to come back tomorrow for a meeting.

Johnno What everybody or just the night shift.

Pete Everybody mate. Every bloody one of us. Most of the boys are meeting down the pub do you wanna come down?

Johnno Why?

Pete The Shop Stewards are working out what we can do. The Union is going to have a rep there in the morning. Some of the blokes are talking about a picket line.

Julie I reckon us wives should join them like the Miner's strike

Johnno How long can they keep the picket up for? Now we know what the rush was all about, the mongrels are settling in for a fight if they have to.

Pete By Christ they're in for a fight.

Julie Too right, solidarity

Johnno They can't lay everyone off. You should be ok Pete but some of the assembly crew won't be needed for a while.

Julie Even if it is just assembly workers. They still have rights, we should stand by each other.

Pete Did you know something like this was going to happen?

Johnno No, but you would have to be Blind Freddie not to see that something was going on... I reckon that I am in for the chop. [to Pete]You must be ok because Alice told you. She knows more than we do. I know her style, if she told you and not me, then I'm in for the chop.

Terri Dad, You're kidding, you're one of the longest serving employees.

Johnno And one of the oldest. I've got a bad feeling. We would normally already have the Steel for the next stage, when it hadn't come by yesterday I knew something was up.

May But how can they treat loyal employees like this. Johnno what are you going to do?

Pete Shit mate, At last year's Chrissy party they told us that they had just had their most profitable year ever and had grown 20%

Julie Yeah. That's right, I remember that.

Terri God, Dad, you must have it wrong.

Johnno I don't know anything yet. They might be giving us all a Holiday for completing stage one early... But I doubt it, Terri, do me a favour will ya, grab me another beer.

Terri Yeah sure Dad.

Johnno Do you want a fresh one Pete?

Pete No mate, I might go down the pub to see the boys. You may be right about the picket line.

Julie Yeah, we should find out who's (*corrects herself*), what's going on first.

(Terri exits to verandah shaking her head at Pete and Julies about face.)

Johnno Righto, what about you May?

May No thanks Johnno I am too shocked and to tired. I can't believe George's would to do this.

Pete Yeah well we're off, if I here anything I'll let you know.

Johnno Righto see you later.

Julie See you, bye

(Terri re-enters from the Verandah as Pete and Julie exit saying good byes to Terri on the way)

Terri Sure you won't join us Mum?

May No thanks. I want to think clearly tomorrow.

(Johnno opens the bottle he gets from Terri)

Terri I'll have one with ya Dad, I am too shocked not to. The bastards.

May Terri! Watch your language.

Terri Sorry Mum,

Johnno I know the feeling Terri, but your Mum's right, they're mongrel bastards.

May I did not say that.

Johnno No, but you wish you had of.

May What I think and what I say can be two completely different things.

Johnno Yep.

Terri You think it Mum... and Dad and I will say it.

May Look I am off to bed. I will see you two in the morning. Without the profanities.

(May exits)

Terri Goodnight

Johnno See ya love.

Terri

Bloody Pete's tune sure changed about the picket line. And what about Julie's bloody solidarity. I heard them from the verandah, the pricks.

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