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THE PLAY

In June of 1942, a young actress in New York City receives a letter from an army captain stationed in Oregon whom she has never met. **Captain Jacob S. Ludwig** tells her that his parents know hers and that he would like to meet her in New York. **Louise Rabiner** answers his formal letter with a lively one and asks him whether he is asking her out on a date. As the two continue to write to each other, Captain Ludwig — who goes by “Jack”

— slowly opens up about his life as a doctor on a military base and Louise describes the ups and downs of auditioning for Broadway.

They want to meet each other, but it is the height of World War II. Jack is treating soldiers wounded while fighting in the Pacific and may be needed in Europe. Louise’s life is also hectic, as she attempts to kick off a career as a Broadway performer. Jack consistently asks his commanding officer for leave so that he can visit Louise, but he struggles to get his request granted.

As the war goes on, Jack and Louise keep writing. Each must make decisions about what matters to them most. Will the two ever meet? And, in the meantime, can they build a meaningful relationship through letters alone?

WORLD-PREMIERE LOVE STORY

KEN LUDWIG'S DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE

BY **KEN LUDWIG**
DIRECTED BY **JACKIE MAXWELL**
KREEGER THEATER | **NOVEMBER 21 - DECEMBER 29, 2019**

“I know that this whole thing we’re doing is ridiculous. Obviously, we like each other, and I feel as though I’ve known you forever. But we’ve never even met each other.”

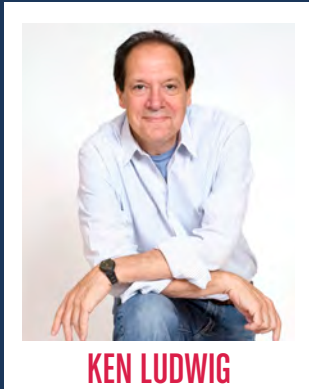
— Jack Ludwig, Ken Ludwig’s *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*

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INGLESIDE
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LET'S RISE TOGETHER
THEATRE OF AMERICA

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MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT



KEN LUDWIG

“There’s something in comedy that deeply pleases us. A shared humanity, perhaps.”

Ken Ludwig fell in love with theater at age six, after an encounter with a warmongering space alien. The alien was the main character in Gore Vidal’s comedy *Visit to a Small Planet*, which Ludwig saw with his parents on their annual trip to see a Broadway show. The play dazzled him because it combined glamor, intelligence and satirical comic bite.

When Ludwig was 12, his parents saw Richard Burton in *Hamlet* and gave him a recording of the production for his birthday. “I listened to it a thousand times,” Ludwig said. He loved the music of Shakespeare’s verse.

Ludwig began exploring playwriting in high school and wrote his first musical comedy at Haverford College, where he majored in music. Next, he studied law at Harvard Law School and Cambridge University. He worked as a lawyer in Washington, D.C., before transitioning to playwriting full time in the 1980s. He writes for about five hours daily, typically starting before 7 a.m. He likes to write early — before he hears anyone else’s voice.

Ludwig has written more than 28 plays and musicals, and has won Tony, Helen Hayes, Lawrence Olivier and Outer Critic Circle awards. Ludwig is known for his comedies, including *Lend Me a Tenor* and *Crazy for You*. He has also explored Shakespeare in several of his plays and in his book *How to Teach Your Children Shakespeare*.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: WORLD WAR II

From 1939-1945, much of the world was at war in Europe and the Pacific. The Axis Powers — an alliance led by Germany, Italy and Japan — began invading nearby countries in an attempt to expand. Although they did not coordinate their policies or strategies, the Axis leaders agreed on a common goal: German domination of most of Europe, Italian domination of the Mediterranean and Japanese domination of East Asia. The Allied Powers fought to defend countries from Axis conquest. They were led by Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and China. The Allies coordinated their foreign policy and military strategies throughout the war.

Although reluctant to commit troops to the war so soon after World War I, the U.S. entered World War II in 1941 after Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Japan won most battles in the Pacific until it lost the Battle of Midway in 1942. After that, the Allies won more battles. In the play, Jack is treating troops wounded in the Pacific. World War II in the Pacific, and as a whole, ended in 1945 after the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, killing over 120,000 civilians.

War was also devastating Europe. In 1938, German Nazi dictator **Adolph Hitler** began invading countries in Europe, including Austria and Czechoslovakia. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Poland’s allies Britain and France declared war on Germany, starting World War II in Europe. Germany proceeded to invade Denmark, Norway, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and the Soviet Union.

The Nazis were also systematically persecuting and murdering people across Europe whom they considered to be racially or biologically inferior in a genocide now known as the Holocaust. Jews were their main target and by the end of World War II, about 6 million Jews had been killed. The Nazis also targeted LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, Roma people, Slavic people, Jehovah’s Witnesses and political dissidents. It is estimated that 11 million people were murdered.

The turning point of World War II in Europe was D-Day (see article). Germany surrendered to the Allied Powers on May 7, 1945.



THE REAL JACK AND LOUISE

Dear Jack, Dear Louise is based on the true story of playwright Ken Ludwig’s parents. In his author’s note, Ludwig writes, “My parents were married for over 50 years ... I wrote this play because of my love and admiration for my parents. They were both heroes at a time when heroism was needed ... He was a modest doctor from the Pennsylvania farm country; she was a Brooklyn showgirl. I miss them, and this play is dedicated to them.”

VICTORY MAIL

World War II made letters an emotional necessity for soldiers who were far from home and for civilians who feared losing their loved ones who were away at war.

Military cargo ships were so overrun with bags of letters that the military developed a program known as “V-Mail” (short for “victory mail”). Letters were photographed on thumb-sized 16mm film and reprinted at full size once the film reached its destination. One roll of film could carry up to 1,700 letters. Because it was so compact and light, V-Mail could be transported by aircraft and delivered in 12 days. Censors read all letters written by soldiers and blacked out information about the troops’ positions or plans.



D-DAY

In the earliest hours of June 6, 1944, the Allies began an operation code-named "Overlord," which became the turning point of World War II in Europe. The risky plan was to land Allied troops on the beaches of Normandy in northern France. This would create a second European front, meaning that the Allies would attack the German army from a new direction, taking them by surprise. The operation required careful preparation

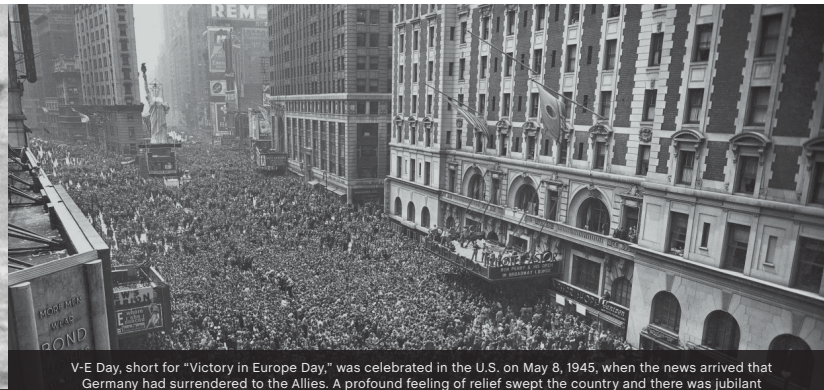
and coordination between 12 nations. Allied undercover agents had given Hitler a misleading tip that the invasion would occur in a different part of France, so he had sent the majority of his troops there instead of to Normandy. The Allied invasion began with airborne troops parachuting onto the beaches, followed by troops that arrived on naval ships before going ashore. The success of the Normandy invasion played a major role in the Allies' victory in Europe. It allowed the Allies to attack the German forces from two sides and forced the German troops to spread out and fight multiple battles at once.

Although the operation was successful, many Allied soldiers were killed or wounded. In the play, Jack says, "On the first day we lost 6,000 men. In all, 73,000 men were killed or reported missing in action. Another 150,000 were wounded." To put these numbers in perspective:

- 6,000 people would fill about 50 crowded metro cars.
- 73,000 is more than the capacity of Nationals Park and Capital One Arena combined.
- 150,000 is 20 percent of the population of Washington, D.C.



American soldiers storm Omaha Beach on D-Day as photographed by Robert Capa for LIFE Magazine.



V-E Day, short for "Victory in Europe Day," was celebrated in the U.S. on May 8, 1945, when the news arrived that Germany had surrendered to the Allies. A profound feeling of relief swept the country and there was jubilant celebration in the streets, especially in New York City's Times Square.

DOCTORS IN WORLD WAR II

In World War II, the most common and severe injuries were head wounds and traumatic amputations of limbs resulting from gunshots and bombs. The Allies operated different kinds of hospitals to meet different needs. Wounded soldiers were sorted by injury type and severity and sent to the locations best equipped to treat them.

Jack first works at a field hospital in Oregon. Field hospitals were mobile. Sometimes the wounded were brought to the base. Sometimes the doctors went out to the Pacific.

Station hospitals were set up in tents and other temporary structures in areas where military populations were relatively large, but not large enough to justify the upkeep of a larger general hospital. They provided general medical and surgical treatment and contained anywhere between 25 and 900 beds. Jack also mentions an evacuation hospital. These were mobile units close to the front that offered more major medical and surgical treatment. They contained either 400 or 750 beds.

Doctors like Jack did not carry weapons. They also treated wounded enemy soldiers. These practices were mandated by international treaties signed by most of the countries fighting in Europe. These countries agreed to treat prisoners of war equally and not to attack unarmed medical personnel who were identified by a red cross on their helmets, uniforms and vehicles.

THE EPISTOLARY FORM

Dear Jack, Dear Louise is an epistolary play, meaning that it is told in letters. While many plays contain letters that characters read directly to the audience or to one another, telling a story entirely in letters is more often associated with novels. Ken Ludwig says his admiration for this genre began with Jane Austen and the generation of writers before her, including Samuel Richardson. Austen wrote *Lady Susan* and the first draft of *Sense and Sensibility* in letters. More recent epistolary novels include *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *The Color Purple*.

Of his own fascination with letters and reasons for writing *Dear Jack, Dear Louise* in this form, Ludwig writes:

"I find that the literary weight that can be achieved through letters is extraordinary. Often, letters are like little beacons into the concerns, loves, joys, tragedies, indeed the very souls of the correspondents, and no other form of expression feels quite the same."

There is a kind of understatement about letters that I find innately moving. Letters, no matter how intimate, have a level of formality that can't be disguised. They aren't usually public, of course. But even the most personal of them are semi-public by virtue of their being written down and transmitted through space ... The lovers who have written a series of intimate letters aren't really alone."



Photo of Jake Epstein and Amelia Pedlow by Tony Powell.

THE STAGE DOOR CANTEEN

While soldiers fought overseas in Europe and the Pacific, American civilians — often led by women — worked hard at home to support those who were risking their lives abroad. Actresses Jane Cowl and Selena Royle opened the Stage Door Canteen to entertain Allied soldiers. Housed in the basement of a Broadway theater, the Stage Door Canteen was a club that offered free food, entertainment and nonalcoholic drinks to soldiers passing through New York City. The club was operated entirely by volunteers who worked on Broadway, including famous actors. These volunteers performed, danced with the soldiers and served food. The canteen was so popular that, in just the first hour that it was open, soldiers ate 500 sandwiches. In its first two years it served 2 million people. In an era when segregation was the norm in the U.S., the Stage Door Canteen was remarkably ethnically diverse. It welcomed all servicemen of Allied nations.

The canteen's leaders and volunteers knew how important the canteen was to the health and emotional wellbeing of soldiers on their way into combat. They took their work extremely seriously and committed to working their shifts consistently until the war ended. Cowl told her volunteers, "These men are going to the Philippines. They are going to the Burma Road. Nothing is too good for them."



With its success in New York, the American Theatre Wing opened canteens in many other cities, including Boston, Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

INSPIRING PUBLIC FIGURES

Jack quotes two political figures whom he finds inspiring and insightful:



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Eleanor Roosevelt was the first lady of the U.S. from 1933 to 1945. She was more politically active than her predecessors, transforming the role

of first lady. She was a notable humanitarian and served as a United Nations diplomat after her husband, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, died in office. Her newspaper column "My Day" was published six days a week in 90 different American newspapers.



WINSTON CHURCHILL

Winston Churchill was prime minister of the United Kingdom from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1950 to 1955.

He was also a well-known orator and author. Churchill was admired by many for his inspiring speeches, his leadership in World War II and his determination in the face of challenges.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the exact seat on your ticket. Ask the usher for help finding it.
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games or pictures.
- You cannot take pictures or make recordings in the theater, even before or after the play.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum, unless invited by the performers to do so.
- Keep your feet on the floor and off the seat in front of you.
- Avoid getting up during a show. If you must leave, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry and gasp. However, don't repeat lines out loud or talk to the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end!

RESOURCES

"Holocaust Encyclopedia"

<https://bit.ly/333BhAh>

The National WWII Museum

<https://bit.ly/34jSCoN>

The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers

<https://bit.ly/321q2ad>

"Who was Winston Churchill and why was he important?" — BBC

<https://bbc.in/335jdFJ>

"WW2 US Medical Research Centre"

<https://bit.ly/2N4XIF3>

"See Photos of Jubilant V-E Day Celebrations in New York City" — *By Eliza Berman*

<https://bit.ly/2BVI0QK>

The Washington Post - "Ken Ludwig's Childhood Dream" *By Marie Arana* — *National Postal Museum*

<https://s.si.edu/2psblzy>

"The War" — PBS

<https://to.pbs.org/2JFCyfe>

"Battlefield Injuries and Medicine" —

By David White and Daniel P. Murphy, Ph.D.

<https://bbc.in/335jdFJ>

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What does it mean to know somebody?

2

How does the way two people communicate affect their relationship?

3

What is the duty of individuals during wartime?



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