

'Heroes?'
Paul Whitfield 2017

HEROES?

By Paul Whitfield



Cast

Arnold Loosemore (Junior)

Friend 1 and Pensions Official

Friend 2 and Lieutenant Colonel Moway

Storyteller 1

Storyteller 2

Storyteller 3

Selina (Arnold Senior's mother)

Amy (Arnold Senior's girlfriend / wife and Arnold Junior's mother)

Scene 1

Arnold

[To audience]

I'm Arnold Loosemore. The year is 1932 and I'm 11 years old. I was named after my Dad, but I don't remember him. He died in 1924 so I was only about three. He was famous though. He was famous because of the medals he won. But he wasn't only his medals to me. He was more than a couple of bits of metal. He was my father.

Arnold's friends come onstage.

Scene 2

Arnold

[To audience]

My mates all know the story. Their parents remember it. At the time, my Dad was all over the papers. Sheffield went on and on about him.

Friend 1

Hey, Arnold, tell us about your Dad.

Friend 2

Come on, Arnold.

Arnold

Not again.

Friend 1

Don't be mean. Tell us.

Arnold

You know it already.

Friend 1

We like it when you tell it.

Arnold

It doesn't change. It's the same old story.

Friend 1

But it's a good story.

Friend 2

It's exciting!

Friend 1

Our Dads don't talk about the war.

Friend 2

Tell us, Arnold.

Arnold

All right. If I must.

Arnold

[To audience]

I pretend I don't want to, but I like it really. Why wouldn't I? I'm proud of my Dad. And I get why they like to hear it so much. It's the kind of story you'd read about in a book, or see in a film.

Scene 3

While the story is narrated, Arnold's friends recreate the action in a stylised, heroic way.

Storyteller 1

Arnold Loosemore was a humble farm worker from Sheffield.

Storyteller 2

An ordinary working man.

Storyteller 3

Nothing special at all.

Storyteller 1

There was nothing then to set him apart from the common herd.

Storyteller 2 and 3

When war came, he stepped up to serve his country.

Storyteller 1

19 years old...

Storyteller 2

And only 5 foot 5 and a half inches tall...

Storyteller 3

He joined the West Riding Regiment in January 1915.

Storyteller 1

First, he was sent to the sweltering heat of the Dardanelles...

Arnold

[To audience]

That's in Turkey. You might have heard of it as Gallipoli.

Storyteller 2

But it was in the mud of Belgium that he earned fame and glory.

Storyteller 3

In 1917 there was fierce fighting near the town of Langemarck.

Storyteller 1

Arnold Loosemore's medal citation tells the story...

Storyteller 2

His platoon were attacking a strongly held enemy position.

Storyteller 3

They were checked by heavy machine gun fire.

Storyteller 2

Arnold crawled through partially cut wire...

Storyteller 3

Dragging his Lewis gun with him.

Storyteller 2

Single handed he dealt with a strong part of the enemy...

Storyteller 3

Killing about 20.

Storyteller 1

His Lewis gun was blown up by a bomb...

Storyteller 1, 2 and 3

Three enemy rushed for him...

Storyteller 1

But he shot them all with his revolver.

Storyteller 2

On returning to the original post he also brought back a wounded comrade...

Storyteller 3

Under heavy fire...

Storyteller 1

At the risk of his life.

Storyteller 1, 2 and 3

He displayed throughout an utter disregard of danger.

Arnold

[To audience]

And that's how my Dad won the Victoria Cross, the highest bravery award the Army can give.

Scene 4

Arnold

[To audience]

But he never explained what had happened when he wrote home...

Amy and Selina onstage.

Selina

I've had another letter from Arnold. Has he written to you?

Amy

Just the usual. How he misses home.

Selina

And misses you.

Amy

Well...

Selina

Of course he does. You two have been sweethearts for so long.

Amy

I only hope he's still my Arnold when he gets home.

Selina

He will be. You know Arnold. Nothing will change him.

Amy

I hope you're right.

Selina

Did he say anything to you about a surprise?

Amy

No. What sort of surprise?

Selina

He doesn't say.

Amy

How odd. Read it to me.

Selina

[reading]

"You will be having a great surprise one of these days."

Amy

What does he mean?

Selina

I dread to think.

Amy

Perhaps they're making him an officer.

Selina

Our Arnold? They barely let him in the Army in the first place. And all those times he's been in trouble...

Arnold

[To audience]

My Dad was twice on charges for going absent without leave.

Amy

Do you think he's been wounded?

Selina

If he has he doesn't sound too upset about it.

Amy

Perhaps it's a little one...

Selina

A Blighty one!

Amy

That's it. Just enough to be sent home.

Selina

I hope it's nothing worse than that.

Arnold

[To audience]

How they must have worried. But if they'd have known the truth it would probably have scared the living daylights out of them!

Selina

[To audience, but as if she's speaking to Arnold.]

You silly boy!

Amy

[To audience, but as if she's speaking to Arnold.]

Don't you ever, ever, do anything like that again!

Selina

[To audience, but as if she's speaking to Arnold.]

We want you home in one piece, Arnold.

Amy

[To audience, but as if she's speaking to Arnold.]

Did you think about what might have happened to you?

Selina

[To audience, but as if she's speaking to Arnold.]

Listen to your Mother!

Scene 5

Arnold

[To audience]

But he didn't. He won another medal, a DCM, in 1918.

When people talk about my Dad they use the word 'hero' a lot. They don't use that word about my Mum, but I think they should.

Later in 1918 my Dad's luck ran out.

He was wounded badly in October 1918, only a month before the war ended.

His left leg was amputated.

He spent two years in hospital so didn't get back to Sheffield until 1920.

My Mum stood by him, waited for him, married him.

They got help at first. The Rotary Club built a hut for him on the back of the house because he couldn't climb stairs. He was given a pony and trap with a driver to help him get around. He was sent on a course to become a chicken farmer, but that was too hard so he tried being a photographer instead.

He never properly recovered from the war and always needed help from Mum.

In 1921 they had a son, Arnold, me.

Dad was ill for months before he died in 1924.

He was 27 years old.

Mum was 25.

Scene 6

Arnold

[To audience]

They say I was at my Dad's funeral, but I don't remember. This is how the paper reported it.

Storyteller 1, 2 and 3

Sheffield's hero!

Storyteller 1

City's tribute at funeral of gallant soldier.

Storyteller 2

Many thousands of Sheffield's people made pause in their duties to pay tribute to the passing of Sergeant Loosemore VC, DCM.

Storyteller 3

After many months of pain...

Storyteller 1

Cheerfully borne...

Storyteller 2

Sergeant Loosemore was released from his sufferings.

Storyteller 3

His death was due to the wounds and sickness contracted during the war,

Storyteller 1

When he outstripped other men in valour.

Storyteller 2 and 3

From France to Gallipoli he was renowned for his gallantry.

Storyteller 1

Every yard of the lengthy route from Stannington to Ecclesall was lined with people.

Storyteller 2

It was fitting that he should have a military funeral...

Storyteller 3

And that he should make his last earthly journey in a gun carriage covered with the Union Jack flag.

Storyteller 1

Drawn by six horses...

Storyteller 2

Ridden by war veterans...

Storyteller 1, 2 and 3

It was an inspiring sight.

Arnold

[To audience]

Can you believe it? That's what Sheffield did for my Dad. That's how proud this great city was of him.

Then they sent my Mother the bill.

Scene 7

Amy and Selina

Amy

I can't pay this. What am I going to do?

Selina

I'm too old to help.

Amy

I don't expect you to help.

Selina

I'm too tired.

Amy

I know.

Selina

A mother shouldn't have to bury her son.

Amy

I just want to make sure little Arnold is alright, now he's lost his father.

Selina

That war was a terrible thing. Too many mothers, too many sons.

Amy

There can't ever be another.

Selina

How could there be? It would be madness.

Amy

How will we live now?

Selina

You'll have a War Widows pension.

Amy

No. The pension we had wasn't mine. It was Arnold's.

Selina

But it can't just stop. That can't be right.

Amy

I went to see the Pension's people. I checked.

Scene 8

Amy and the Pensions Official.

Pensions Official

I'm terribly sorry, Mrs Loosemore, but the pension your family were receiving was payable to your husband and nobody else. It ends with his death. I'm sorry.

Amy

But he was a hero! Surely the widows and sons of heroes shouldn't be left to starve.

Pensions Official

The rules are the rules, Mrs Loosemore.

Amy

So you can't help me?

Pensions Official

A grateful nation thanks your husband for his sacrifice, but no.

Scene 9

Selina and Amy

Selina

What about that fund the Mayor set up?

Amy

The Loosemore fund?

Selina

That's it. Didn't they raise £1000? That would help.

Amy

I had a letter from them.

Letter from Old Comrades Association.

Lt Col Moway

Dear Mrs Loosemore, I was sorry to hear you are having such difficulties with your pension. My Committee have been taking this matter up with the trustees of the Loosemore Fund but we have not been able to ascertain finally what your income should be from that fund...

Amy and Selina

Selina

What does that mean?

Amy

No money yet...

Letter from Old Comrades Association.

Lt Col Moway

I will write you further regarding this matter. Yours, Lieutenant Colonel Moway.

Amy and Selina

Amy

Maybe something later.

Scene 10

Arnold

[To audience]

Mum did get money from the Loosemore Fund. They gave her £25 a year, the interest on the £1000. You try living on £25 a year, even in the 1920s. But my Mum, Amy Loosemore, never gave up. She worked for me. She fought for me. The King might not have given her any medals, but I would have done, if I had any to give. She's my hero too.

Music

END

Glossary

VC is the initials for the Victoria Cross, the highest medal a British soldier can receive.

DCM is the initials for The Distinguished Conduct Medal. The DCM was a medal awarded for exceptional bravery.

Valour is another word for bravery.

"Blighty" is how the soldiers referred to Britain or home.

"Absent without Leave" is when a soldier takes themselves away from work in the army without permission.

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