

# Not Too Far Distant

a new play by Becky Boesen  
inspired by the life of Clarence Williams

Commissioned by History Nebraska  
Produced by BLIXT



**BLIXT**

LOCALLY GROWN



HUMANITIES NEBRASKA



NEBRASKA  
CULTURAL  
ENDOWMENT  
*Endless*  
ARTS & HUMANITIES



ART  
&  
CHRIS

ZYGIELBAUM



Institute for  
Holocaust Education



History  
NEBRASKA  
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## Dear Educator,

Thank you for incorporating the arts into your classroom or educational group, using the *Not Too Far Distant* Curriculum Guide. We are excited that the *Not Too Far Distant* performance and community conversation is coming to your area. We hope that this guide provides a starting place for you to deepen your students' understanding of and connection to these events, and that *Not Too Far Distant* can serve as a catalyst for interesting conversations, projects, and explorations in your classroom. This guide is created for 6th–12th grade students and provides additional information and resources about the historical context within the show.

If you have any questions about *Not Too Far Distant*, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you again!

Warmly,

*Not Too Far Distant* Team

# Collaborators

## Becky Boesen, Playwright

Becky Boesen is a Nebraska-based theatre artist, arts and cultural consultant, asset mapper, and advocate for creative enterprise. She helps organizations throughout Nebraska and the United States discover the powerful link between creativity and entrepreneurship. Becky also serves as an adjunct professor at Nebraska Wesleyan University, specializing in playwriting and community engagement. As a working playwright, Becky has penned several commissioned works including PUDDIN' AND THE GRUMBLE and WHAT THE WIND TAUGHT ME, both of which debuted at the Lied Center for Performing Arts and continue to see statewide and national productions. Becky was featured as a "top 20 under 40" by the Lincoln Journal Star for her business leadership in the arts and is the recipient of 3 Mayor's Arts Awards. She has been honored nationally as a Chime Changemaker, is an NEA award recipient, and is a member of ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild of America.



*"A person who intercepts a story and brings it to life for audiences"*

## History Nebraska, Commissioner

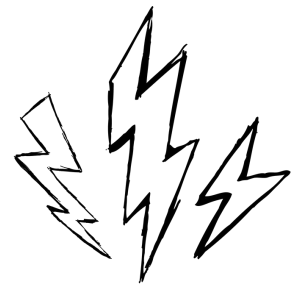


A commissioner is a person or institution that commissions (or, provides money for) the performance(s) of a play. Without the generosity of donors and commissioners, it would not be possible to bring this play to you!

History Nebraska is a statewide educational institution that connects people to the past through our library and research center, conservation facility, interpretive sites, and the state archeology and historic preservation offices. History Nebraska preserves and interprets our state's past, contributes to the education of its citizens, and uses the tools of history to shape a better future for all Nebraskans.

## BLIXT, Producer

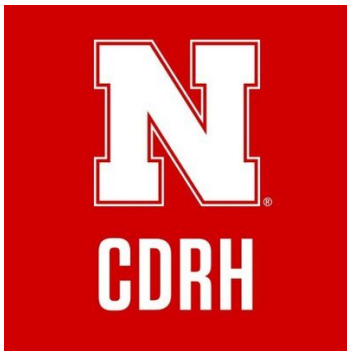
Blixt Locally Grown is a nonprofit organization founded by Petra Wahlqvist and Becky Boesen, which puts the focus "high powered arts for humanity" as a meaningful tool for community building and inclusion. Petra Wahlqvist is the producer of The Dream Switch Project and is a project creator, educator, and producer. She most recently served as the Education and Community Engagement Director at the Lied Center for Performing Arts. Wahlqvist also teaches in the Johnny Carson School of Theatre & Film at UNL. Wahlqvist is well known throughout Greater Nebraska for her keen organizational and production skills as well as her relationship-focused approach. She is the President and Co-Founder of Blixt Locally Grown. ([www.blixt.space](http://www.blixt.space)). Since 2014, and working alongside school systems and nonprofit collaborators, Wahlqvist and Boesen have brought live theatre and related social and emotional focused education and engagement to over 3,200 students of all ages throughout Lincoln and Greater Nebraska.



**LOCALLY GROWN**

A producer is a person or institution that produces a play or dramatic work. In other words, they oversee all the details of the process: venue, finances, cast, crew, etc.

# Collaborators, cont'd.



## Nebraska Stories of Humanity

Nebraska Stories of Humanity is an online portal, featuring the stories of five Nebraskans who either survived the Holocaust or helped to liberate concentration camps and went on to share their experiences with friends, neighbors and schoolchildren throughout the state. The featured individuals are survivors Bea Karp, Hanna Rosenberg Gradwohl and Irving Shapiro and liberators Clarence Williams (main character in Not Too Far Distant) and Maurice Udes.

Led by doctoral candidate Beth S. Dotan in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in collaboration with the Center for Digital Research in the Humanities, the portal went live April 26, 2022.

"The site tells their stories through letters, documents, photos, maps and other artifacts, all annotated and organized by individual," Dotan said.

Interactive maps, along with full-text searchability, will help users explore the World War II experiences of these individuals. <https://nestoriesofhumanity.unl.edu/>

## The Institute for Holocaust Education



The Institute for Holocaust Education strives to provide quality Holocaust education programming across Nebraska and beyond. We offer resources and training for educators, as well as events for students and the general public.

The Institute for Holocaust Education has provided a list of resources for educators and students on Holocaust education:

<https://www.ushmm.org/teach/fundamentals/guidelines-for-teaching-the-holocaust>

<https://echoesandreflections.org/>

<http://www.ihene.org/>

[https://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/Experiencing%20History%20Guide\\_0.pdf](https://www.ala.org/tools/sites/ala.org.tools/files/content/Experiencing%20History%20Guide_0.pdf)

<https://newspapers.ushmm.org/>

# INFORMATION ON THE SHOW

## Themes

War (WWII), Keeping stories alive, Holocaust, Friendships, Family, Purpose, Sacrifice, Grief, Writing, Hope, Faith.

## Synopsis

“It’s almost unbelievable that anyone could be hardened to the point of doing the brutal things they did...” A young man from the Midwest is sent to war, carrying with him the hopes of the free world. What Staff Sergeant Clarence Williams encounters there challenges and changes humanity forever. History touches the present when a new generation takes a journey through time to experience World War II alongside Clarence himself. Centered around his personal letters home, we learn that sometimes what seems so far away is much closer than we think. Filled with hope and heart, *Not Too Far Distant* honors the experience of the American soldier and reminds us that we all have the power – and the responsibility – to help create a brighter future.

# Character Descriptions

## THE PAST

Staff Sergeant Clarence Williams – a medic and member of the 42nd Infantry who helped liberate Dachau

Master Sergeant Gray Kalani – the leader of Clarence’s overseas unit in the US Army

Private Jimmy White – a dedicated member of the team with a deep sense of obligation  
Private Benny Blue – A young soldier who has never been far from home

Gretchen Williams – Clarence’s wife: strong and sincere

Shelby – a visitor from the future

Conductor – the guy who drives the train

## THE PRESENT

Staff Sergeant Clarence Williams – a medic and member of the 42nd Infantry who helped liberate Dachau.

Ryan – a graduate student hoping to interview Clarence

Dio – an undergraduate hoping to interview Clarence

Re – an undergraduate student hoping to interview Clarence

Shelby – an undergraduate student who visits the past

# Vocabulary Used in the Production

**V-mail:** V-mail, short for "Victory mail," was a particular postal system put into place during the war to drastically reduce the space needed to transport mail thus freeing up room for other valuable supplies.

**Propaganda:** information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view.

**Genocide:** the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying that nation or group

**Rationing:** allow each person to have only a fixed amount of (a particular commodity).

**Furlough:** leave of absence, especially that granted to a member of the armed services.

**Sergeant:** a noncommissioned officer in the armed forces, in particular (in the US Army or Marine Corps) an NCO ranking above corporal and below staff sergeant, or (in the US Air Force) an NCO ranking above airman and below staff sergeant.

**Gas chamber:** an airtight room that can be filled with poisonous gas as a means of execution.

**Concentration camp:** a place where large numbers of people, especially political prisoners or members of persecuted minorities, are deliberately imprisoned in a relatively small area with inadequate facilities, sometimes to provide forced labor or to await mass execution. The term is most strongly associated with the several hundred camps established by the Nazis in Germany and occupied Europe in 1933-45, among the most infamous being Dachau, Belsen, and Auschwitz.

**SS Trooper:** The SS. The SS (Schutzstaffel, or Protection Squads) was originally established as Adolf Hitler's personal bodyguard unit. It would later become both the elite guard of the Nazi Reich and Hitler's executive force prepared to carry out all security-related duties, without regard for legal restraint.

**Enlist[ed]:** enroll or be enrolled in the armed services.

**Draft[ed]:** Ordered to serve in the armed forces.

**Deployment:** the movement of troops or equipment to a place or position for military action.

**Commodes:** a piece of furniture containing a concealed chamber pot.

**Barracks:** a building or group of buildings used to house soldiers.

**Mess hall:** a room or building where groups of people, especially soldiers, eat together.

**Pullmans:** a railroad passenger car with especially comfortable furnishings for day or night travel.

**Basic training:** the initial period of training for new personnel, involving intense physical activity and behavioral discipline.

**Rainbow Division:** The 42nd Infantry division of the United States Army National Guard.

**Casualties:** a person killed or injured in a war or accident.

**Posies:** a small bunch of flowers.

**Cesspool:** an underground container for the temporary storage of liquid waste and sewage.

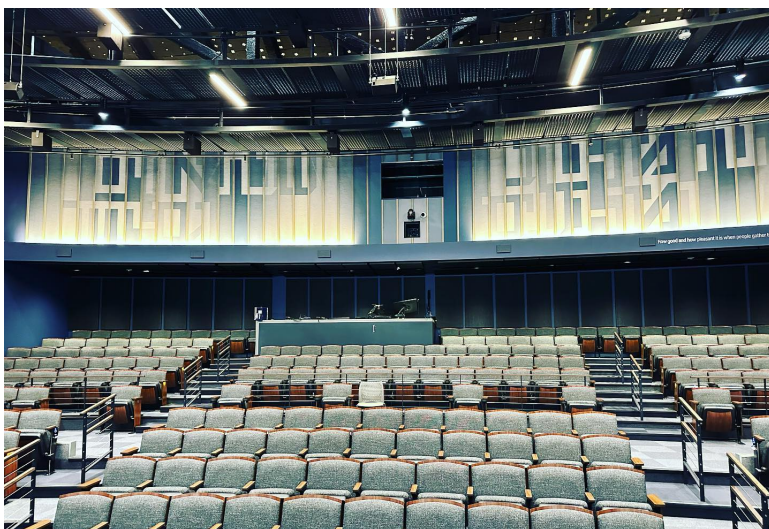
**Artillery barrages:** A barrage is continuous firing on an area with large guns and tanks

# WHAT CAN I EXPECT WHEN SEEING THIS PLAY?



## What does a "touring Production" mean?

A touring Production is a production that is created to be suitable for various locations. Set, Props, and Costumes are sometimes minimal and compact in order to fit inside a trailer. Sound and Lighting elements are stored digitally and can be inserted as needed depending on the location.



## What is a New Work?

A new work is a dramatic work that has never been produced before. That means YOU are among the first to see it! A new work involves a more complicated production process, as there is no "blueprint" for this particular story; it involves trial and error, and these first performances help to shape the story and bring the script to life for the first time. The Playwright, Becky Boesen, has worked diligently throughout the production process, as a result, she has produced many revisions of the script that has further developed the communication from production to audience members. Becky has met with WW2 experts as well as modern-day soldiers, to weave in details from primary sources. From WW2 Letters, to a fully realized production, Not Too Far Distant is an excellent example of how New Work is Brought to life.





# Discussion Questions

## Before the show:

- What do you know about WWII?
- Do you know anyone involved?
- Have you heard/read first-hand account from a WWII veteran or Holocaust survivor?
- Have you seen a new play/do you know what a new work is?
- Do you know what it means to originate a role in a play?

## After the show:

- What are your key take-aways?
- What did you learn about WWII?
- What did you observe about character relationships?
- What did the letters reveal about the war?
- Do the letters contain only truth?
- What do you think it's like to wait for someone like Gretchen did?
- Is there a character you relate to? Why?
- Why is this story important to tell?
- In what ways are you similar to and different from Clarence?
- What do the characters say about sacrifice during the play? If they change their minds, what causes this to happen?
- What elements of the show demonstrated the historical time period?
- How did design elements (lighting, sound, costumes, scenic) help to tell the story?
- Touring shows require creativity and innovation; What everyday items did you spot in the show and in what ways were they used?

# Curriculum Connections

- SS HS.4.1.a (US) Evaluate the cause and effect of historical events on various groups in the United States.
- SS HS.4.1.c (US) Evaluate the impact of people, events, and ideas, including various cultures and ethnic groups, on the United States.
- SS HS.4.2.a (US) Identify and evaluate how considering multiple perspectives facilitates an understanding of history.
- SS HS.4.2.b (US) Evaluate the relevancy, accuracy, and completeness of primary and secondary sources to better understand multiple perspectives of the same event.
- SS HS.4.3.a (US) Identify how differing experiences can lead to the development of perspectives.
- SS HS.4.4.b (US) Evaluate strengths and limitations of a variety of primary and secondary historical sources.
- SS HS.4.4.d (US) Synthesize the relationships among historical events in the United States and relevant contemporary issues.
- SS HS.4.5.a (US) Construct meaningful questions about topics in U.S. history.
- SS HS.4.5.d (US) Synthesize historical information to create new understandings.
- SS HS.4.1.a (WLD) Evaluate the cause and effect of historical events in the world.
- SS HS.4.1.c (WLD) Examine the impact of people, events, and ideas, including various cultures and ethnic groups, on the world.
- SS HS.4.2.a (WLD) Identify and evaluate how considering multiple perspectives facilitates an understanding of history.
- SS HS.4.2.b (WLD) Evaluate the relevancy, accuracy, and completeness of primary and secondary sources to better understand multiple perspectives of the same event.
- SS HS.4.3.a (WLD) Identify how differing experiences can lead to the development of perspectives.
- SS HS.4.4.b (WLD) Evaluate strengths and limitations of a variety of primary and secondary historical sources.
- SS HS.4.4.d (WLD) Synthesize the relationships among historical events in the world and relevant contemporary issues.
- SS HS.4.5.a (WLD) Construct meaningful questions that initiate an inquiry.
- SS HS.4.5.d (WLD) Synthesize historical information to create new understandings.