

# STILL LIFE

## WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

A play by Phil Lewis

**This play requires permission to perform and a performance fee**

### SHORTENED **SAMPLE** VERSION

For full version please contact:

[publications@phil-lewis.net](mailto:publications@phil-lewis.net)

*Approx. 9 minutes.*

### **CAST:**

**MARTINA:** 30+

### **SET:**

Lectern and spotlight.

## WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

(OPENING MUSIC.

LIGHTS COME UP ON AN EMPTY LECTERN.

MARTINA ENTERS TO RECORDED APPLAUSE.

SHE ACKNOWLEDGES HER STUDENTS (THE AUDIENCE))

**MARTINA:** Thank you.

Good to see so many of you here today. Especially as it's the last of the term. The last for all of you. Your last day of University life. I suppose congratulations are in order. Give your self a hand.

(SHE ENCOURAGES THE AUDIENCE TO APPLAUD)

As you know this is not only your last day in this august institution, but mine too. After all, who wants to live their life in an institution? Next week I leave for Australia and a new life.

I want to thank you students for your good luck wishes. Some of them heartfelt, I am sure. And thank you for the present. A nice gold pen. Engraved as well. I suppose you think I can now go on to rewrite history all over again?

For the last eight years I've taught history, but nobody really listens and learns. There's an old adage that 'History repeats itself.' It's true, we don't understand the lessons of history, because nobody really learns from it.

For me, acts of war have been a fascination from early youth. I can give facts upon facts, but it would mean nothing to you as individuals. History has a way of being changed to suit the modern thought. Over time black becomes white, wrong becomes right.

This University has a syllabus, a curriculum, within which certain areas are defined as necessary to be taught. A corporate line that education authorities have designated does not necessarily contain the whole and complete truth. Sometime a spin is necessary to put on facts, to make them more glamorous, easier to understand and remember. All in aid to get you lot through the University system.

Given mankind's lengthy history – thousands of years – it's only in recent times that the leaders of countries stopped going into battle with the warriors of their fiefdom. If one country went to war with another – everyone fought for their country. From the serfs to the Kings – all joined in battle. Suddenly, it seems, here we are today, the politicians who start the wars are secure in bunkers and protected by distance.

I can't help feeling those Kings of old went to war for noble reasons. Today, wars are about religion, oil and political gain. Although most of those things, apart from oil, applied years ago, there does seem to be a feeling of 'something to be gained for the good' about their old crusades. But today there appears a definite lack of humanitarian reasons to go to war.

I look at you students today and know - none of you is going to enjoy a period of peace. Your country is going to be engaged in some war or other, for the rest of your lives. That makes me sad. That makes me mad.

What is war?

War is when two countries disagree and decide to fight. Might makes right. When one surrenders the two resume the dialogue, but with one in a stronger bargaining position than the other. One side having gained land, the other lost. Often the same war is fought years later with a slightly varying result.

In the modern world, whatever land is taken is given back, because of pressure from the rest of the civilized world. Further emphasising there's no point to a war that's only about land.

Originally great empires rose from a warlike culture. Persian, Roman, Greek, Britian. All these empires covered vast expanse of the globe. All now gone. Nothing lasts. Expansion to point of collapse. Nothing is permanent and very little changes after a war. The war, and the result of the war, rarely resolves the original problem.

Great Britain has been at war for nearly thirty years. A surprising fact to some of you, I know.

Falklands 1982.

Gulf 1990.

Bosnia 1992.

Kosovo 1999.

Sierra Leone 2000.

Iraq 2003.

Ireland - for ever.

Britain has been in all those events, classified as wars, in recent history and is still in two. And what has resulted from the UK's rash of wars?

The Irish still don't want the United Kingdom to have control over them. Britain still own the Falklands. Argentina still think they own Malvinas. The

Saudis still have their oil and their country. The Taliban still occupy areas of Afghanistan and will probably fight there forever. Iraq lost a dictator, but will probably find another as soon as the occupying forces leave. Sierra Leone will revert to its own sense of government.

Very little has changed.

Most of the people in Britain are not aware that we're still at war. Apart from the occasional media coverage, most people don't know that it's a real war we are talking about, not some army exercise. A skirmish.

Modern wars are intensely scrutinized. Video cameras in the front line. BBC correspondents with the troupes. When a soldier dies in combat we have no real sense it is a war. We hear two men died today. One last week. Another tomorrow. During the First World war hundreds of thousands died in a day! It's estimated over 15 million overall. That's what we think a real war is.

When we hear a soldier dies in Afghanistan, apart from many don't even know where the country is on a map and why we're fighting there, but it doesn't seem that important. But ask the relatives of the dead soldier – they'll tell you what war is all about. Grief, mostly. Waste of life too.

EDITED