

Seems Only Yesterday...



Seems Only Yesterday is a 4-hour scenario about four childhood friends that have not met for 10 years meeting again at a funeral. Their deceased friend Bob has left them a house together – a house where they have spent many days in their school years and have many memories together. However, things have changed since then and they are all different people now. During this scenario, the players explore this change and their feeling of nostalgia in connection to one another, to find out how a friendship changes and how parts of it still remain with the characters. The scenario is split into three acts, incorporating many Flashback scenes.

This larp was written by Lauma Klintsone in 2015

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Preparing to Run the Larp

You will need to print and cut:

- the character descriptions,
- all the photos to be used in the larp. (If you have photos you would like to add to the given selection, feel free to do so. They are only used as prompts for ideas and have no set meaning individually.)
- the conversation prompts for Act 1.

You will also need exactly 4 players. You can use any location that has at least four seats and one table/desk in it. No other props are required, but if you like you can have cups or glasses of water to portray drinks at a pub/funeral feast.

Workshop (~45min)

Begin the larp by short introductions. Ask the players to tell about themselves – their names, where they are from (this is not necessary if they are acquainted before, act accordingly to the group). Then, as a further question, ask them to imagine and shortly describe some friend that they used to have as a child and are no longer in touch with.

Explain that this larp is focused on the feeling of nostalgia that we get when remembering things like that. The players will portray four friends from school who have now not heard from each other in about 10 years, but are brought together by the death of another friend named Bob. In this story, Bob himself will never be present, but may be referred to as necessary. He was a bit of a loner, he used to collect things – from candy wrappers to sea-shells, to art -, he was often sick and usually didn't like going out, but used to invite the other four over to his house to play or hang out there, and it had become a second home to all of them in their youth.

Over four hours, you will need to create a sense of the whole life of your characters – both present day and their past. Since all characters share memories, emphasize the use of “Yes rule”: if a player has established a fact from the past, other players must accept it as a true fact from that moment on, although they may play out remembering something slightly differently. Example: somebody states that the boys once sneaked into a graveyard at night and saw the priest who they thought was a ghost. Everyone has to agree that they have been at the graveyard, but may claim that they don't remember seeing anyone at all, but were simply frightened by noises.

Give the players their characters at random. The players may read the information given within the tables and choose a name for their characters (it should be a name beginning with the letter their character has – A, B, C or D, so that the other players may better remember who they are), but should not currently discuss the characters. The characters may be male or female, this is up to the players.

Once the players have acquainted themselves with their roles, ask them to pay attention to the last section of their character descriptions found below the tables. These are the character's expectations for his childhood friends' current lives – what they imagined would happen according to who they were as children.

One by one, the players together create the characters' childhood selves. Start with character "A". The other three players discuss what their characters' expectations have been about this person and therefore what they might have been like as a child or teenager. For example, someone may state "I used to copy your homework because you were clever", or "You didn't really like to break rules," or whatever seems likely. Player "A" may ask the other players some questions about their character, but cannot make statements about their character. Therefore, players B, C and D create player A's character as a child, players A, C and D create B's childhood self, etc.

When this is done, the players should tell the others their characters' "Life goals" and "Fears/regrets", but not share the "values" or "life situation". It is important to note that while the other players know the goals and fears of others' characters, their characters might not be aware of them. This is done so that later in the story they may build conflicts by 'accidentally' mentioning things that will annoy or hurt the other character.

Once all the outlines for the characters' past and present selves have been established, the workshop moves on to another stage. During this stage, nobody is talking, but rather portrays their character by movement and location in the room. The players here try to get more into character by showing their reactions to different situations.

Ask the players to play out these scenes by displaying movement:

1) *Present day*. They are all on a bus, feeling that they'll be late for a work-related situation. In this scene, the other players should be imagined as strangers on the bus, not their characters – each player acts independently. Ask the players to first place themselves in a part of the room in a position they think they would be in during such a situation. Then talk them through the scene, giving prompts after a few moments: You are two stops away from your stop now. Your stop is next now. Now the bus has stopped and you need to get off the bus.

2) *End of high school*. It's the prom night. The players place themselves in positions they would find themselves in during the dance. Talk them through the scene: There's a loud fast song playing. You notice that the boy/girl someone of you has a crush on has just entered the room. A slow song comes up. You go to ask the person you like to dance, but they leave or are already dancing with another person.

3) *School days*. It's just before a maths lesson, and a test is coming up today. The players place themselves where they would be in the classroom. Talk them through the scene: It's five minutes until the test. Now the bell rings. Now you just received the test. Now it's five minutes before the test is over. Now the lesson is over.

4) *Early childhood*. You are about four years old. You are all in a playground together, meeting for the first time. In this scene, you will establish your childhood relationship: who is the leader? Who is sometimes left out?

Talk them through the scene: Have someone be at the playground first, then call out the characters one by one as arriving. In the end, have them leave one by one as well (e.g. "A's mother has asked to go home..")

After these scenes are finished, you can start the larp. (Add short breaks as necessary inbetween acts.)

Playing the Larp

The larp is divided into four acts. Act 1 is like “catching up with the news”, where the characters meet again, and we discover the conflict between the characters’ present day selves and the others’ expectations of them, as well as the potential conflict points between the adult characters themselves. Act 2 brings them to the house of their deceased friend and their common past, through memory scenes and discussion about what to do with the house. Act 3 consists mainly of narration, assisted by pictures, and leads to conflict resolution.

More about running the memory scenes and setting up each Act is stated below in the Act descriptions.

Act 1: At the Pub. (~30min)

Purpose of this act: The four characters meet again after many years and discover how they have changed. Some of them are disappointed in others, some are surprised at their achievements, and both of these reactions serve to create some tension between them, but no open conflict yet.

Setup: Place the four seats with a table in the middle. This is the table at the pub where the four friends meet after the funeral. Optionally you may also have glasses of water or other drinks near (but not on) the table. All the characters are sitting round the table.

Place the conversation prompts face down in the middle of the table as well.

Techniques: 1. The act starts when everyone is seated and drink a first toast to Bob. The act ends then the Game master comes near the table again, to ask “Would you like anything else?” and the characters refuse and get up to leave. Practice this technique once: Ask everyone to sit down and, instead of playing, discuss the room within a short time span, started and finished just like the Act will be.

Before ending this act, follow closely to see that all the characters have met with some expectations for themselves and seen contradiction, so as to create tension for all of them.

2. Conversation prompts: Whenever the players run out of things to say, they may pick up one of the conversation prompts on the table and read them out as part of the conversation. It is ok not to use them if the players feel the conversation is running well on its own, keeping in mind that their goal is to discover their characters’ present day differences.

Act storyline:

The four friends have met in a pub after the funeral, before going to the house of the deceased. They use this time to ‘catch up’. They discover that their expectations of each other are quite far from reality, and their present selves view life in quite different ways. This builds tension, but should not create an open conflict.

Act 2: In the House (~1h)

Purpose of this act: In this part the goal is to build a conflict between the four friends by discussions about what to do with the house and memories of past fights.

Setup: Each player receives a short event description pertaining to a specific room at random. If possible, designate an open area in the room for playing out memory scenes.

Techniques: Memory scenes will be played during this act. A player says “It seems only yesterday we...”, and then describes the event in connection to the room as written on their respective papers. He may add any extra details wanted. The players then act out the even, ended by the initiator of the scene saying “cut” whenever they feel the scene is complete, and then finishing it off by shortly narrating what consequences this event had.

This technique should be tried out by the game-master initiating a casual scene, for example, “seems only yesterday I ran into my sister and her boyfriend at a shop..”. The game-master points to other players they want to act as themselves, their sister and her boyfriend, and the shop assistant in this scene, and after a casual conversation says “cut” to end it.

Act storyline:

As the characters arrive at the house, Bob’s lawyer announces to them that they have been left the house as a shared heritage. They are welcome to look around the house and talk about what should be done with it.

The game master reads out the descriptions of the rooms as the four characters pass through the house.

After each description of the room ends, one of the players starts a memory scene as described. When this scene is complete, the characters discuss the memory, and should disagree with each other over its meaning, or find reason to comment on each other based on the differences between the characters’ past and present. For example, after the scene which shows the Family Man supporting a mischievous plan, another player may point out that “you used to be a lot of fun before, I wonder what happened to you”. Emphasize to the players that conflict is expected to rise gradually.

In the fifth room – the hall – the characters find the will of the deceased friend and start to talk about what they want to do with the house. Here, the conflicts should grow, and this part ends in a heated discussion. In the middle of it, the GM announces that the Grandfather clock in the room strikes four o’clock and cuts out their voices.

ROOM DESCRIPTIONS:

1. The Kitchen

You are let into the house through the back door. The building is old and huge, and so is the kitchen. There are still all the old cupboards and counters, a wood-burning oven, and even one of those little lifts to send food to the upstairs living room, although it might no longer be operational. Everything is neat and clean, and there are half-finished jars and bottles of food and spices lined up on the shelves. The modern appliances – the fridge, the cooker, the coffee maker and toaster – all seem to be in discord with the museum-like qualities of the room itself, making the room slightly anachronic.

2. The Dining Room

Directly next to the kitchen there is the dining room. It is not a large room, and most of it is taken up by a long table and chairs. There are eight seats at the table, which is covered by an embroidered tablecloth. A large paned window to the garden runs along the length of the room, so the room is well lit. There are several paintings with still life of fruit and flowers hanging up on the walls – part of Bob's collections, to be sure. A lamp is low hanging over the middle of the table, while the ceiling here, as the rest of the house, is quite high.

3. The Downstairs Living Room

You walk, next, to the Living room. There is a large fireplace and a stash of wood next to it, and delicate porcelain sculptures are set on top of it. A sofa and two armchairs of different styles are placed opposite the fireplace, with a glass coffee table in the middle. The floor is partially covered with a thick Persian rug, and, like in the dining room, there are several paintings on the walls. The windows here are smaller, but seem very tall, and are covered in draperies. There is a large old wardrobe next to one of the windows.

4. The Guest Bedroom

Finally you decide to look into the guest bedrooms you used when you stayed here for sleepovers. Two rooms with huge double beds were connected with each other. The first one you enter is long, about a half of it is taken up by the bed. There are some more paintings, but not on the walls – they're set down in the corner and covered up with a sheet. There is a dressing table with a mirror gone slightly dim, and on the dressing table there are some framed butterflies – surely another of Bob's collections.

5. The Hall

As you leave the bedroom to enter the hall, the old grandfather clock chimes loudly. As you turn to look at it, you notice a box of photos lying next to it with a handwritten note saying, *"To A, B, C and D"*.

Act 3: The memory lane (~30 min)

Purpose of the Act: The purpose of this act is to create a sense of nostalgia and reconcile the conflict of the characters through it. The players should work towards a reconciliation, rather than pushing their character's goals.

Setup: Place the photos on the table, in a neat stack. The players should take seats around the table.

Techniques: Most of this act should be narration. If the players want to, this act may also use memory scenes, like in Act 2, with the difference that no prompts for situations are given, but the players need to come up with entirely their own ideas as they go through photos.

Act storyline:

As the sound distracts the characters from their argument, someone notices a box lying on the table and opens it. There are some black and white photos and postcards in the box, and in many they can also see themselves.

In this part, the goal is to reconcile their conflicts through memories. For example, if two people had an argument about whether or not the house should be turned into a museum, they can narrate a memory where they had a school excursion to a museum and everyone liked it (or, quite the opposite, it was really boring).

The players look through the photos, and whenever someone gets an idea from a photo, they can start narrating the event this photo is from, with others joining in. If the narrator would like to have a short scene played out for it, they may start this narration with "It seems only yesterday", as in Act 2. The scenes are ended with the player who started it saying "Cut"

This scene ends when the GM portraying Bob's lawyer arrives again and asks them what they plan to do with it. They may have reached a decision or not, just give some short answers.

Debrief

Sit in a circle. There will be three questions that the players answer one by one.

First round: How are you feeling right now?

Second round: What do you feel you can take away from the larp?

Third round: Anything else you would like to say?

If during this debrief someone has a question or comment to what another person says, leave this discussion to the third round if you have time, keeping the first two short and without comments.

A
The Businessman
Core values:
- Wealth
- Security
- Respect
Life goals:
- Early retirement owning a lot of money
Life situation:
- Owns a large business
- Single
- Lately drinks too much
Fears/ regrets:
- Not having a family or friends to grow old with

EXPECTATIONS FOR:

B: He/she likely does something important and serious, as he/she was always the clever one.

C: He/she's probably not got much stability in his/her life; I don't think he/she would ever have finished much formal education.

D: I expect him/her to be working with people somewhere, as a manager or something, though I haven't heard of him/her much.

B
The Family Man
Core values:
- Love and belonging
- Responsibility
- Loyalty
Life goals:
- To see his/her family happy and safe
Life situation:
- Works as a secretary
- Married to the love of his/her life, with 4 children
- Financial struggles
Fears/regrets:
- Never finding time to just enjoy life

EXPECTATIONS FOR:

A: I think he/she probably lives a quiet life somewhere, not wanting to be the centre of attention.

C: He/she might have become a writer, as he/she was always good with words and had a huge imagination.

D: I've seen him on a TV show, but he's probably unhappy with such a small role.

C
The Adrenaline Junkie
Core values:
- Adventure
- Challenge
- Competition
Life goals:
- Travel to every possible country
Life situation:
- Working on a travel book; volunteering
- Recently ended a relationship
Fears/regrets:
- Not leaving any lasting impact on the world

EXPECTATIONS FOR:

A: Likely he/she does some charity work, something for the greater good.

B: I imagine he has a lot of friends and family that will remember him for his kindness.

D: I'm still waiting to really hear about him, I always expected him to do something big and unique in art.

D
The Actor
Core values:
- Fame
- Being admired
- Recognition
Life goals:
To become famous
Life situation:
- Has a minor role in a TV series
- Engaged, with a child from a previous marriage
Fears/regrets
Being remembered only as vain and selfish

EXPECTATIONS FOR:

A: I believe he/she might still live in that old town and do some office work or something not involving too many people around.

B: I expect him to be quite poor, because he never thought of himself and never planned anything.

C: He's probably found some unique way of expressing himself, perhaps he's an inventor.

Memory scenes, ACT 2:

THE DINING ROOM: When we were visiting as children, Jack's parents served us cabbage soup for dinner. Everyone except B hated the soup, while B always ate whatever food was served. We were left alone in the room for eating, and had to decide how to avoid eating the soup while not offending Jack's parents.

THE KITCHEN: No adults were home that day. We were in our early teens. D had gotten some non-specific alcohol from an unknown place and wanted to try it out with his friends. B was quite supportive of the plan, while A strictly opposed it.

THE GUEST BEDROOM: While having a sleepover when we were 10, we were playing with an Ouija board. A wanted to know who in the school had stolen his new book the previous week, and the board spelt out C's name. C claimed that A had moved the pointer himself and we started fighting over whether or not the magic is even real.

THE LIVING ROOM: We were quite young at the time. We were playing "The floor is lava" in the living room, even though we had repeatedly been told not to play the game indoors as there was a lot that could be broken. C got it in his head to prove that he can climb all the way to the top of the huge wardrobe. In the end he fell down, tearing down the curtains and breaking a glass over a photo, but not getting hurt. We argued about how to solve this without the parents ever knowing about it.

Prompts, ACT 1:

What happened to Emily? I thought you were engaged.

When did you last come to this town?

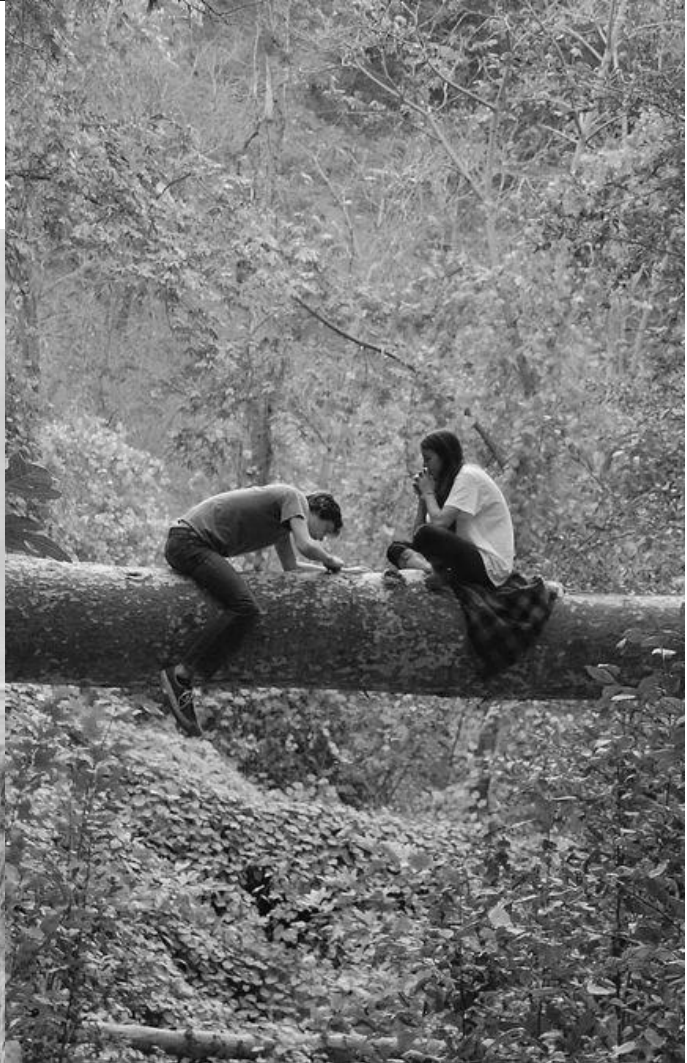
Where are you staying today?

How are your parents doing?

What was your college like?

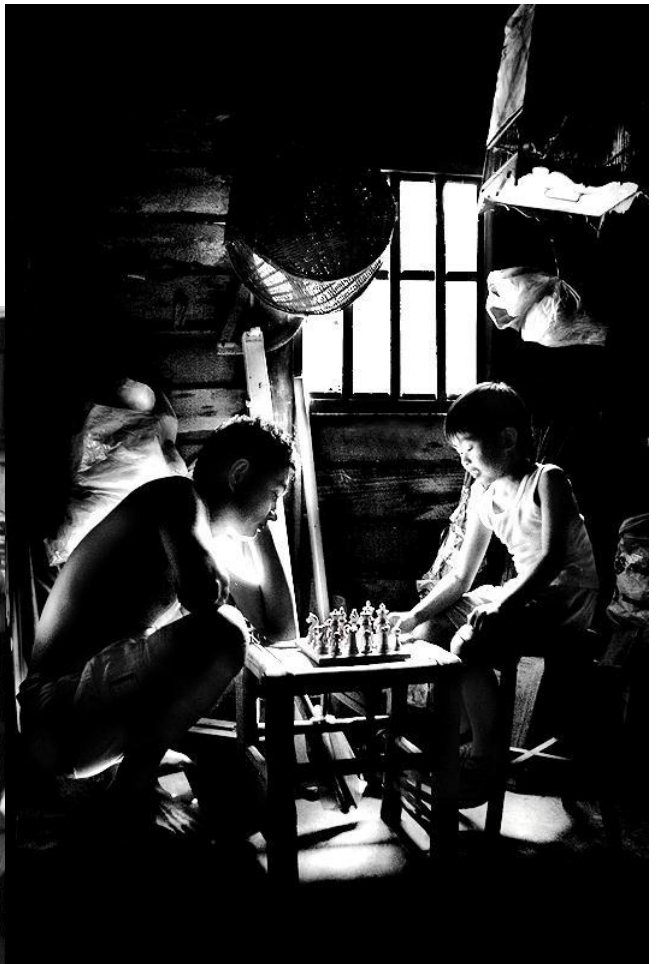
What are your Christmas plans?

Can you tell me more about your job?















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