

## The Trouble with Clifford opens at Blackhorse

By Anne Ritchie

A world of doubt and hope, caring, humor and strength awaits the audience when *The Trouble With Clifford*, by L.E. Hines, opens at Blackhorse Village Players.

It's all about the Fergusons, and it could be your family too. Amidst the excellent cast, creatively directed by Kim Blacklock, the audience may discover themselves, wondering how the insightful author could have known them so well.

As Gladys, Ginny Cathcart delights in every moment of her family life, celebrating birthdays in unexpected ways, cooking breakfast so diligently the bacon resembles 'charcoal briquettes,' even disputing 'pretty?' explaining 'when you get to be my age, you are just plain beautiful.' Cathcart steps into the role with grace and empathy, and offers a 'just plain beautiful?' performance.

Gladys's daughter Nancy (Monique Bourgeois) follows lovingly in her mom's footsteps, as if kindness and a caring nature were hereditary. Bourgeois captures the care and gentle intimacy of parent and child, and responds in kind. She offers a touching performance of a character we all want to have in our family, championing what's right, dealing with what's wrong.

Though Gladys may be the center of the home, Clifford (Craig Butler) is the main beam. Butler reveals every characteristic of fatherhood and husbandry one can imagine. Just as any harried man of the house, he seeks shelter in the garage for household repairs. Troubles arise as he struggles with the inability to fix certain family troubles. Butler's role demands caring, anguish, understanding and a touch of sarcasm to lighten the load, and he gives it his all.

While everyone balances precariously on the beam of family life, a volatile and wisecracking Marty (Kyle Pattison), bounces on the opposite end, leaving the family even more rattled and slightly off balance. Marty treats life as a game . . . until a sharp curve ball hits him square in the face. Pattison offers a remarkably believable portrayal of a baby brother who hides behind a shield of humor and struggles between maturity and watching NHL playoffs in the midst of family crisis.

Marty is bolstered by Sandra (Joanne Pulfer), on the verge of motherhood herself. Pulfer brings an endearing nature to the role as she reluctantly manages Marty's life. No stranger to talent, Pulfer gives us a complex character eager to take on life's challenges, only to have one thrust upon her unexpectedly. Pulfer rises to the occasion and shows us what any good wife and daughter-in-law would do.

Marty's big brother Richard (Aaron Verwey) struggles through life hoping to carve a comfortable niche in the family home without overstaying his welcome. Verwey has an appealingly strong yet shy demeanor; a loner in a household crowded with family, issues and all. His humorous frustrations and foibles are so well-played that even a young friend Gwyneth (Jessica Pfundt), 'never Gwyn?' questions his motives. Pfundt capably handles a small role which becomes a turning point, and she has us hoping Gwyneth 'never Gwyn?' will see more of Richard (and Pfundt see more of Blackhorse).

*The Trouble With Clifford* offers rare and decisive insight into family life, troubles and all. The setting, ingeniously designed by Kim and Chuck Blacklock, may have been your home movie: a full family room blasting the hockey game linked to a well-used eat-in kitchen looking out to a latticed back yard and Dad's garage. You may even suspect that only the names have been changed to protect the innocent, that being members of your own family, and if you are lucky, the reading of a heartfelt letter, the best moment in the show, could have been addressed to you.

Discover for yourself *The Trouble with Clifford*, playing at Blackhorse until April 27. Call 905-880-5002 for ticket information.