

History Theatre's 'Not for Sale' unearths a painful episode of racism in South St. Paul

A man's battle against bigotry becomes the subject of a play inspired by his daughter.

By [Randy Furst](#) Star Tribune
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Barbara Teed remembers the agony of her teenage years in South St. Paul in the 1960s — being called hateful names brimming with racism and enduring false rumors that she was allowing men to pick her up on Concord Street.

"I was traumatized," says Teed, who is white. "I went to school every day with a knot in my stomach."

Teed was the daughter of Arnold Weigel, a thriving white South St. Paul Realtor who was targeted after he gave an impassioned speech in 1965 in support of selling homes in white neighborhoods to people of color.

His business was boycotted and collapsed, a bank foreclosed on his house, his car was repossessed, and all of that shattered his marriage.

Weigel's story is retold in a riveting play that premieres Saturday at the History Theatre in St. Paul. "Not for Sale" draws together Teed's recollections and extensive research on her father's demise that she chronicled in her 2013 master's thesis for Hamline University.

The play was scheduled to open in March 2020, but was postponed because of the coronavirus outbreak that led to the cancellation of so many local theatrical events.

Teed, who is now 70, wrote a script telling her father's story that was performed at the Minnesota Fringe Festival in 2015. She had sought out and gotten advice on the project from Warren Bowles, a veteran actor, director and playwright. Bowles and Michael Fritz, husband of Teed's daughter, Lindsay, an actress who helped her mother with the script, e-mailed Ron Peluso, artistic director of the History Theatre, encouraging him to see the Fringe production.

Peluso went to see it. "I thought it was a good story and that it should be told," he says. "Arnold Weigel stuck his neck out to do the right thing and all his real estate colleagues and neighbors and friends turned their back on him. ... I think our job at the History Theatre is to tell stories of people who have courage, who stand up for their convictions."

The Fringe production was only 50 minutes long. "Knowing Barbara had never written a play before, I asked her if she'd be willing to collaborate with a playwright who had more experience. She said she'd be open to that," Peluso says.

Kim Hines, an actor, director and award-winning playwright, became the lead playwright for the show with Teed's assistance. Hines, who is Black, says her parents were blocked by a Realtor in the 1950s from acquiring the land to build a house in the suburbs, and by a half-dozen banks that refused to give her father a mortgage to build a house in south Minneapolis.

Hines said she found it surprising that what happened to Weigel had never been publicized. "I thought it was very important to tell Arnie's story," she says. Weigel was "way more than an ally. He was a co-conspirator in the struggle for racial equity in home ownership." She said that his stand wrecked his business and his whole life.

In 1965, the Minnesota Association of Realtors had named Weigel one of the state's top two Realtors, both for the number of home sales he had made and for community service. That year he delivered what proved to be a life-changing speech at a forum in West St. Paul on "Human Rights, a Challenge to the Suburbs." He appealed to community leaders to embrace integrated communities in the all-white suburbs.

"Let's have all the southeast suburban local governments in a joint statement declare that, on behalf of the citizens of West St. Paul, South St. Paul, Mendota Heights, Inver Grove [Heights] and others that their communities are willing to extend the hand of fellowship to all Americans, regardless of race or creed," he said, according to a text that Teed found.

He called on the public to support "ecumenical and interracial harmony."

The talk was reported on WCCO-TV, and Weigel continued to try to sell homes to Blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Jews in the all-white Christian suburbs. It created a firestorm.

There were angry phone calls to the family's luxurious house and threats to burn it down. Several times motor oil was poured into their fish pond behind the house.

Actress Monica Scott portrays Pearl Mitchell Jackson, a Black social worker and friend of Ivah Weigel, Arnold's wife. Jackson, who lives in St. Paul, is 96 years old today. In the play, Jackson talks about appearing at a League of Women Voters meeting at the invitation of Ivah, which was boycotted by some women, according to a diary that Ivah kept.

Arnold Weigel subsequently invited Jackson to speak at a Kiwanis Club meeting. Jackson recalls the first question she was asked when she finished was, "Do you know Johnny Jones, he's the boy we got to shine shoes at the Athletic Club?"

Says Jackson, "What he was doing was put me down." She says she got up and left.

Two of the child actors and one adult actor from the original play had to be replaced for the current production, but otherwise the cast is intact. Peluso said that with understudies in place for all the roles, he is hopeful the play will make it to the opening and through the entire run despite the pandemic.

In addition to in-person performances at the [History Theatre](#) from Saturday through Feb. 27, the show will be livestreamed Feb. 17-27.

"With the murder of George Floyd, America has gone through this racial reckoning, and the play, I think, is more relevant than ever," Peluso said.

Staff librarian John Wareham contributed to this report.

'Not for Sale'

Who: By Kim Hines and Barbara Teed; based on a short play by Teed.

Where: History Theatre, 30 E. 10th St., St. Paul.

When: Saturday-Feb. 27, in-person shows; Feb. 17-27, livestreamed.

Tickets: \$30-\$53; 651-292-4323; www.historytheatre.com