



# CHILDGROVE



OUR GHOST'S NEED LOVE TOO

A Seven Episode Limited Series

By

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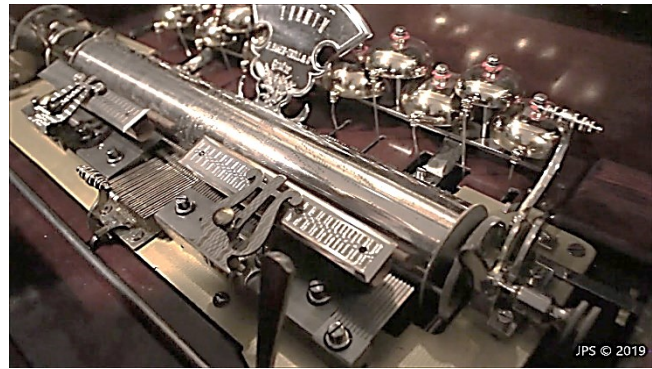
## OVERVIEW:

By 1966, St Joseph Missouri had already seen over a hundred years of intense history. Once a town of millionaires and gothic mansions, it whispered its dying dreams to a nine-year-old boy born with the ability to see and hear a time before his own but lives with the fear of his own emotions.

One block away was another lost and lonely boy of the same age, who could not control his. Something pulled them together for one short summer, to be each other's best friends, and each other's healers, despite the fact they were born 53 years apart. To prevent a gruesome tragedy, one would slide into psychotic distress, as the other begins a journey across decades to deliver the lost soul of his friend back to his own time and live the life gifted him by ripping out the pages of history and writing their own ending instead.

## THEME:

The Childgrove seeks to build on the imagery and elements of the classic gothic ghost story with old mansions and manor houses, secret passages, a music box that plays in a minor key, whispered voices, hidden rooms, and even an asylum. Yet perception is governed by perspective, and reality is a matter of context.



The secret room contains Edward's steam-powered train set. The dark tunnel turns out to be a servants access from the house to the carriage house, nothing more. The whispered voices are John's memories of his life with Edward before he was born. And the song on the music box becomes what John latches onto to bring him back from his oubliette outside of time.

## TONE:

Told in two distinct sections, it begins in first-person from the perspective of John looking back on his childhood in 1966, followed by a third person following of Edwards journey from the tragic death of his family in 1914 to John's birth in 1957. My first exposure to



filmmaking was at age 13, getting to stand behind the camera with Peter Bogdanovich on the Paper Moon shoot, as he explained why he shot scenes as he did. I could not help but see that as I wrote this story set in the same location, my hometown, that uses real history, places, people, and childhood memories as events in the story. It is presented much like classic cinema, with narration, muted colors, deep focus shots, and high contrast.

## HISTORY AND LOCATIONS:

The timeline of the first three chapters follows the actual chronological events of the summer of 1966, including the bell tower shooting in Austin Tx and Mao's cultural revolution in China. These play into John's view of the world and are reflected in the events in 1914, giving fuel to whether John is confabulating a reality or experiencing an actual temporal event. Whereas St Joseph's big whigs plowed down much of their history in the madness of urban renewal in the '70s, some of the locations used in the story still stand and could be used for location shoots.

The Edward story, starting in 1914, also follows real history. The businesses and incidental characters all existed, the films and music are all concurrent. Edward encounters historical characters like St Joseph's notorious madam, Lizzy King, Boxer Jack Johnson, who passed through town after his release from Leavenworth, only thirty miles away, and Vaudevillian/silent movie star Harry Langdon, who played the Christal Theater on the actual date in the story. To my knowledge, Lewis Hine, the photographer who helped end child labor in the U.S., never shot in St. Joseph but was active in the area. Later, in London, Edward joins members of the Bright Young Things, including Noel Coward and Tellula Bankhead.

In either time, St Joseph is a central character in the story. Its fall from grace from an industrial hub to a midwestern backwater punctuates the theme of loss, memory, and passing the pen to other hands when the writing of our chapter is over.

## MOOD:

There is a lot of humor mixed with the drama, but overall, it is a melancholy and emotional story in the genre's tradition. The multi-period nature lends itself to striking visuals like the Thames on fire, David's big Vaudeville number in the crowded and majestic Missouri Theater, Hand harvesting corn under an open late summer sky, the horse-drawn milk cart rolling down a 1917 residential street with young Richard sweeping in arks from house to house with milk carriers, John seeing the ghosts of the dying business district superimposed on the empty streets, Richard's wedding on his English estate grounds, the stained glass and wrought iron of the library and Edward's magnificent home imploding at the end of Johns story.

Like many period dramas based on classical literature, the story contains narration, especially in the first three episodes told in first person from the perspective of an old John looking back at his childhood. I understand the controversy involving narration, but it is used, for the most part, as a counterpoint to the action, much like Stand By Me. As in Goodfellas, the narration breaks the fourth wall twice, with John's epilogue in the first half as he walks through the ghostly images of his childhood and the entire cast of ghosts themselves at the end.





## EPISODE ONE.



Opens with one line; Time is not what you think it is, followed by John's vision of an event long before his birth with the river Thames on fire. It's the last day of school, and summer beckons. He meets Edward, who teaches him croquette, introduces him to his mother, and soon becomes his best and only friend. Scattered throughout the summer, events like July 4<sup>th</sup>, working in his dad's shop, singing at the state psychiatric hospital, etc., add to the nostalgia and the deepening mystery. John has a series of dreams and visions of murder and suicide, sharing them with Edward, who has the same nightmare. When Edward attempts to go

back to John's house with him, the two discover that they vanish from each other's sight after a certain radius from Edward's house. John declares Edward a ghost.

## EPISODE TWO

With doubts about each other's true nature, the boys realize they live in two different eras, 1966, and 1914 and can only exist together in Edward's "bubble." They also realize John possesses Edward's dead sister's stuffed bear, which now exists in both times at once.



A clock begins ticking when John's parents sell their home and must move in 30 days. The tension rises when Edward's life quickly unravels after his father's death, shot as a British spy at the outset of WWI. Edward's uncle Victor returns from England to take Edward and his mother back with him, but Edward's mother, in her grief and events unknown to us, overdoses on Laudanum, leaving Edward an orphan in the hands of the man John identifies as the suicide victim he saw in his visions.

## EPISODE THREE

John's personality begins to split as the two timelines become jumbled, and another him begins taking over his voice and mind, begging him to relinquish control so the new him can save everyone and "end this forever."

The boys interpret from the visions and dreams that Victor intends to murder Edward for control of the business Edward's father left for him, and Edward vows to kill his uncle first if that's what it comes to. Edward becomes more paranoid and emotionally violent. He pushes Victor to the breaking point without realizing his misinterpretation has led to a tragic conclusion. Victor attempts to kill both boys but is ultimately killed himself when John finally understands that his other personality is stuck in a repeating timeline of tragedy where both boys die. He must overcome his gentle nature and save his friend by killing Victor himself, breaking the time bubble, and sending his consciousness into limbo. The house in 1966 implodes with the vacuum of time rushing in, and John is left catatonic and drifting in darkness. He awakes a



week later to find Edward, now 54 years older, has returned as his psychiatrist to save him. We then see that the narrator is John in his 60s who walks amongst the ghosts of his memories.

## EPISODE FOUR

The story's focus shifts to Edward, left in 1914, screaming over the body of his dead uncle and telling the police his friend from the future saved him. They quickly determine that Edward could not be the murderer but is mentally broken and is institutionalized. John begins appearing to him for brief moments to explain he is living time out of order and witnessing moments in Edward's life. His doctor soon moves him to an orphanage to share his life with another young patient, David, abandoned by his family for loving song and dance and being too effeminate. Edward forms a tight bond with his new friend and helps encourage him to find his dream by getting him onstage in a vaudeville



show. David's triumph is short-lived as he contracts the second wave of the Spanish flu and dies. This is the breaking point for Edward, who runs out of the orphanage with the intent to die in the cold. He is found on death's door by a dairy delivery boy who ends up being Victor's illegitimate son. Unable to face Richard, believing now that John was never real and that somehow he killed Victor, Edward attempts suicide to be saved again by the dairy crew of three other boys. Edward finally lets go of the pain he

shouldered, including his imaginary childhood friend John.



## EPISODE FIVE

Edward, now convinced that he is innocent, joins the No Man's Land crew with three other orphans that live above the stables and deliver dairy in a horse-drawn cart in St' Joseph's poor and ethnically diverse south end. They evolve together for the next two years before the company declares them redundant with the replacement of motor trucks after Edwards picture is taken by Louis Hine and used to end child labor. Rather than take severance, the boys bargain for ownership of the otherwise unwanted horses, carts, and barn. They form Family Moving and Transport Company. A year or so later, Edward and Richard defend two black children who are being tormented and are beaten by a white bully but saved by the



intervention of Jack Johnson, who offers his protection. The bully returns in the night after Johnson leaves town and sets fire to the stables. The fire consumes the building, leaving Edward hospitalized and Richard even more badly scarred. They are found in the hospital by Edward's old psychiatrist, who adopts them both, giving Richard legitimacy to inherit Victor's manor in England, and his share of the family fortune. Edward moves the company to his father's old warehouse and uses his investment potential to buy moving trucks to restart the Moving and Storage business. Edward takes his new brother to his old house to tell Richard about the father he never knew and the truth of the family's tragedy. He also presents him with the train his father built for him. Edward and his new family then go to St Louis for Richard's medical treatment.

## EPISODE SIX



We pick up the story four years later with Edward and Richard's new family in St. Louis. Then Richard, now 21, assumes ownership of Victor's English estate, and the two boys move in there. Edward falls in with the Bright Young Things, and as a stunt, they dump kerosene in the Thames and light it. What burns is their boat, and they swim to shore, taking refuge in the Criterion Theatre with Noel Coward and Tallulah Bankhead, who tries to pick Edward up. Edward confesses that he's been drinking to quiet the voices, and despite sleeping with partners of both sexes, realizes that he is asexual. He collapses on the empty theater stage while seeing his ghosts and wakes to an intervention from Richard, who announces their father has died while Edward was bingeing. Edward's new mother moves to England, bringing the memory box Edward had as a child, and Edward discovers a lego brick in the bottom, left behind from John's bag. The shock causes John to reappear.

## EPISODE SEVEN

Edward now insists John is real, while Richard is convinced he is a delusion, and in a heated argument, Richard is triggered and throws Edward out where he returns to St. Joseph in exile. Now living a monkish life in his old family warehouse, his "brother" Harold, who has Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, advises him to forgive everyone for everything and find peace. Richard sends ship tickets for all of them and forgiveness and acceptance for his brother, so Edward closes his life in St. Jo, sells everything except the house, and moves back to England. The group reunites later for Richard's wedding, and shortly after, Harold is killed in WWII. Finally, Edward comes back to St. Joseph in 1957, writes a diary for John, and sells this sister's Steiff bear to John's neighbor in the liquidation of the contents of his house, which now sits empty, awaiting its final explosive ending nine years later. He watches as John's spirit follows the woman with the bear to be reunited with his infant self just days later. It concludes with an epilogue on the meaning of time, memory, and hope for all who follow, delivered by the cast of now ghost children on the steps of the vacant lot that once held Edward's home.





## CHARACTERS



**JOHN:** John is nine years old, an INFP, pacifist who fears his own emotions, keeping them locked in the image of the old nailed shut door in his father's shop basement. He has spent a lifetime with imaginary friends, seeing history play out around him, and is bullied by his "spare the rod" principal. The visions he experiences are unbeknownst to him, his years as Edward's passenger in the latter episodes. His story arc forces him into the impossible situation of committing a violent act to break the time loop of tragedy and results in the complete breakdown of his mental image. The door is left open as to whether the events in his life are real or just his delusion. The adult John, the only surviving character by the epilogue, narrates the story and reflects on the nature of time and reality.



**EDWARD:** Like John, Edward is nine but lives in 1914. He is more outgoing than John, precocious, loves to quote Aristotle, and has been educated in a British boarding school. He suffers from emotional dysregulation and will spiral out of control in emotional situations. He lives with his mother, who will not leave the house, so Edward becomes her keeper and is trapped with her. Edward's arc is long, spanning 53 years, dealing with trauma from the loss of his family, the existence of John, who he writes off as his own imaginary friend, the death of his orphanage best friend to Spanish flu, multiple suicide attempts, and as he grows older, substance abuse to quiet the ghosts of his life and alienation with the world from his realization that he is asexual, and will never have a family of his own. He eventually comes to terms with his existence and works to assure he can deliver John's spirit back to him when he is born in 1957. We see his burial in the epilogue.



**ELIZABETH:** (mid 30s) Raised as a ward of a wealthy family, Edward's mother is a frustrated socialite, brilliant like her son, but trapped in her position. She suffers from "Melancholia," following Edward's infant sister's death and abandonment by her husband, a sociopathic narcissist. Her arc is tragic, as she loves her husband, who married her to be the arm-pie wife, stealing her away from the affections of her brother-in-law Victor, who honestly loved her. When her husband is shot as a British spy at the outset of WWI, Victor comes to rescue her, but she overdoses on Laudanum in her grief.



**VICTOR:** (45ish) Brother to Edward's father, Victor, was born in the London Docklands to abusive parents. The brothers escape together, work their way to success as European toy importers for wealthy American families. Brother Robert sets up shop in St. Joseph with the assistance of Elizabeth's rich lawyer warders, while Victor secures stock and finances the purchases. His brother, however, has abused Victor as well, luring the women he loves away, keeping him hidden in the business, embezzles funds to pay for the very treasures he uses to get Elizabeth like the music box that plays "The Childgrove," the name of the estate

Victor procured with the hopes of starting his own family, and blackmail because of Victor's illegitimate son via a St. Joseph prostitute. When the woman he really loves picks suicide over him, and Edward's paranoid accusations and murder threats prove real peril, the triggered Victor decides to be the villain he has been made out to be and kill his brother's son, who stands to be the sole owner of the business he helped start, his brother's last insult delivered after death. It is only after Victor's death that Edward, and eventually his own son, learns the truth about his genuine and tragic search for love and acceptance.



**NILES:** Dr. Niles Hanson (early 30s) is called after a wounded and bloodied Edward is found screaming over the body of his murdered uncle. When Edward begins talking to what appears to be an invisible friend, Niles takes him to the State mental institution to begin treatment for his delusions. He is appointed guardianship and soon develops a genuine affection for his charge, placing him in a local orphanage with another patient named David. After David's tragic death three years later, just when he and his wife Lorraine were going to adopt the pair,

Edward disappears, in his grief, by running off into the night. Niles begins a three-year search for his charge, who turns up burned in a hospital along with another boy who turns out to be Victor's illegitimate son, which no one knew of before. He and his wife adopt both boys and take them to St. Louis for burn treatment and psychotherapy. He dies young in St. Louis while the boys are studying in Oxford, England.



**DAVID** We meet David at "almost nine" when he is brought to be a companion to the orphaned Edward, now 10, in the mental institution. David was abandoned, left on a train platform by his father and stepmother, who found his love for song and dance and his effeminate nature repugnant. He withdraws from the world, but his friendship with the kind and attentive Edward and their confidant relationship restores his happy, singsong personality, and the boys form a deep healing bond. Edward encourages his friend to follow his heart and audition for a vaudeville show, where

David floors everyone with his talent. However, it is performing in the crowded theater that exposes David to the Spanish flu's second wave, and within a week, he dies holding John's



hand. Although he is now dead, he remains a catalyst and a powerful emotional force for Edward throughout his life and appears in flashbacks and internal dialogue.



**RICHARD:** (12-50s) Richard was born the illegitimate child of his prostitute mother and Victor, and because of his uncle's blackmail, kept secret from the world. When his mother dies, and his father, who unbeknown to him has been killed, fails to come for him, he hides out in the streets until finding employment delivering milk with three other orphans in a small stable on the outskirts of town. After the Spanish flu takes one of the team, he is forced to work multiple shifts, and during one, discovers a dying boy who turns out to be his cousin Edward, now 13. When Edward believes he is responsible for Victor's death, their relationship

turns hostile until the truth is revealed they were both victims of his uncle's evils, after which they later become legal brothers after their adoption by Edwards doctor. His legitimacy is restored, Richard inherits his father's English estate, "Childgrove Manor," and becomes a British citizen. Eventually, he houses WWII evacuee children, marries and adopts two war orphans, and starts a children's psychiatric hospital with his adoptive mother Lorraine, and Edward.



**ALBERT:** (16-50s) Natural philosopher, humanitarian, and leader of No Man's Land, the boys who live together in the dairy stables. His mother died at birth, and his father, a volunteer medic in WWI, is killed by a German bomb. He shows up with Herold one day, a starving but kind child with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, who had been abused and used as a thief by those taking advantage of his innocence and inability to judge the consequences of his actions. His father commends him on his act of "taking responsibility for those God has put in your path," and they raise Harold as Albert's brother. After their father's death, the two find work with the dairy where Albert can keep a close watch on his brother and give him jobs he is well suited for. When Edward

shows up following the death of one of his crew, he helps solve the dilemma between Edward and Richard, hires Edward, and when the dairy makes them redundant, bargains a family business for the for of them, which he runs until his retirement.



**HAROLD:** (14-30s) Of Irish descent, Albert's defacto brother and the fourth member of "No Man's Land" was born an unwanted child to an alcoholic mother and given away for his naivete as "brain-damaged." He is found emaciated but smiling by Albert and becomes the much-loved younger brother. Herold, despite the disadvantages of his birth defect, is wise, gentle, and deep in his own way. His observations help Edward ultimately come to peace in his life and mend a rift between Edward and Richard to end

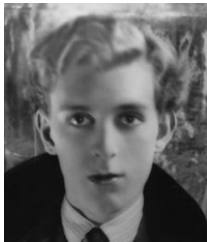
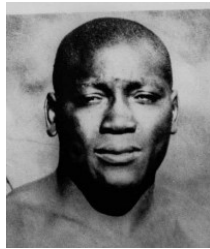
Edward's lonely exile. Harold and Albert trade places with their head of family employees to fight in WWII, where Herold gives his life to save a family under fire. The children's hospital in England is later dedicated and named for him.



**LORRAINE:** (mid 30s-late 60s) Wife to Niles, adoptive mother to Edward and Richard, Lorraine is one of the three percent of female psychiatrists globally in the 1920s, working with both Melanie Klein and Anna Freud in childhood therapy. She becomes primary therapist to her adoptive son Edward after his adoption, and after her husband's death, she moves to Richard's estate to deal with her own grief. She eventually opens her own practice, and because of that, the estate becomes the place children with serious issues are sent during WWII's evacuation of London. After the war, she helps Edward and Richard convert the manor house into a children's psychiatric center named for the late Herold.

There are several historical characters as well, all of whom make brief appearances.

- Boxer Jack Johnson
- Photographer Lewis W. Hine
- Silent film star Harry Langdon
- Sculpture Anna Colman Ladd
- Bright Young Things Stephen Tennant, Siegfried Sassoon, and Brian Howard
- 1920s West End Stars Noel Coward and Tallulah Bankhead.





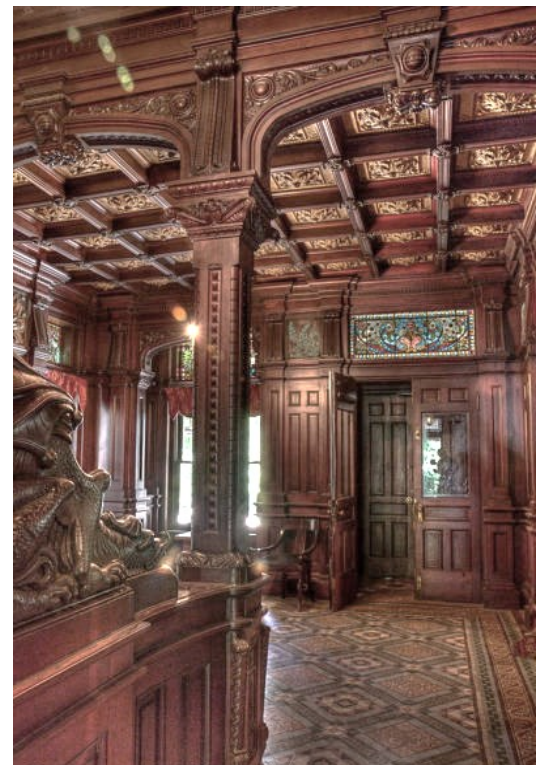
## LOCATIONS IN ST. JOSEPH MISSOURI:



Edward's home in St. Jo is the Shakespeare Chateau B&B.



and if you rent the B&B to film, there a dozen bedrooms that come with it for cast and crew.







The exterior is the R. T. Davis (Aunt Jemima Flour Mill- yes, pancake flour started here.) house.

It is a private residence now.





The Robson Mansion sits across the street from the B&B and has this incredible period bedroom to act as Edward's in England.





The now vacant C.D. Smith Drug Company building is Edward's Family warehouse.

Subbing for the interior of Richards English Manor, St. Jo's City Hall.



There are dozens of houses on Cathedral Hill that could sub as John's house



Pictured elsewhere are the Missouri Theater on page five and the library on page four, and the Missouri Valley Trust Company in the Paper Moon shot. The Mount Mora cemetery is perfect for the cemetery scenes. There are still many old empty industrial buildings for the empty downtown and historical shots for digital backgrounds. St. Joseph is overloaded with locations and could fill everything except English exteriors. It is also distressed now, and there are vacant and deteriorating houses to film Edward house in its old age as well.