

## Inner Circle Essay – Chana Wise

I am an emerging writer. Fifteen years ago, I emerged from my life as a hardworking, stay-at-home-mom with a husband, two young teenagers, a dog, a Ford Expedition, and a kick-ass recipe for humus, into a hardworking, stay-at-home writer with an ex-husband, two launched adult kids, a well-worn Prius, and a recipe for a great AABA song. The emergence, or maybe the emergency began when my kids were in middle school. Someone sniffed out the former Theatre majors and I was asked to help organize a performance for a school fundraiser. What started out as a fun diversion writing parody lyrics about a quirky Southern California private school, turned into a passion over which I have not yet gotten. A passion for writing musical theatre.

The Academy for New Musical Theatre in North Hollywood, (now called New Musicals, Inc.) was just a, hop, skip and 2-hour commute from where I lived. It was the next step on my journey. Several hundred songs and eight musicals later, The Inner Circle is my most recent step. Only, it was more like a leap, or a deep dive. In the dark. Holding hands with Ken.

Many years back, I heard a pitch about a different weekend seminar, which, aside from severely restricting bathroom breaks, promised its participants an opportunity to transform their lives. Always game for a little life transformation, I enrolled. I was told by the smiling-from-ear-to-ear and clearly already enlightened twenty-two year old enrolling me, that although the first day of the seminar was still weeks away, the mere act of signing the form and paying the tuition meant that the seminar had already begun for me - from that point on I would begin to reap its benefits just by my decision to enroll. It was actually true. And it was the same experience I had when I enrolled in The Inner Circle. A lot of the benefit came from both the consultation with Ken just before I enrolled, and the moment I did. There was a shift in the way I saw myself. No doubt, The Inner Circle is a serious investment of both time and money. Breathtakingly serious. But somehow after investing that much in myself and in my project, if I didn't know it before I understood then, that I really meant business. Even if it was show business.

My Inner Circle weekends have provided some very enlightening moments. Like the time Ken said, "Chana, you don't have to do everything yourself." What? Really? I was the one who got the kids up, made their breakfasts, packed their lunches, drove them to school and to their lessons, picked them up from play rehearsal, made their dinners and got them to bed. It hadn't even occurred to me that I could get someone to help produce a reading in New York rather than try and coordinate the whole megillah from another time zone. Or when Ken likened getting writing feedback to the philosophy of decluttering guru, Marie Kondo – you're not obliged to address all of the notes you're given about your show – just pay close attention to those that really speak to you - or in her world – those things that give you joy. (Not so strangely, notes that really speak to me, DO give me joy.) Plus, now I have very organized clothes closet. These "aha" moments, combined with just a plethora of other knowledge about the business, incredibly inspiring guest speakers, super informative break-out sessions, and the general sense of feeling like I'm being guided in the right direction has made my Inner Circle experience invaluable.

I have several shows that are in various stages of completeness. Some have gone to full production, while others are still in development. The show that was uppermost in my mind when I enrolled in The Inner Circle is *Mary Marie*, (the musical). *Mary Marie* was adapted from

a novel of the same name written by Eleanor Porter, who was the author of its more famous sister work, *PollyAnna*. When I read *Mary Marie*, I fell in love with its young protagonist. My composer/collaborator, Carl Johnson, was also excited about the prospect and we began work on the musical in 2010.

Its developmental journey started at New Musicals, Inc. in LA and since that time *Mary Marie* has been invited to be part of several New Works festivals (NAMT Festival 2014, Rubicon Theatre 2013, Chance Theatre 2015, etc.) and earned some proud accolades (Richard Rogers award finalist 2014), but despite great momentum, prior to last year, we had been unable to find our way to the next step, a professional production. Thankfully, stemming from advice from Ken, we were given our first fully staged New York reading of the show one day after our 2<sup>nd</sup> Inner Circle Weekend. Out of that reading, we'd been offered a production opportunity by our 3<sup>rd</sup> weekend, and we are now partnering with an established theatre company, working on getting investors, and refining a production script with the hope of a 2021 Off-Broadway opening.

This business is tough. Really tough. And asking for money to continue in it is the toughest of all, and awkward, and humbling. But I guess if I can't ask for a \$10,000.00 investment from Ken, how am I ever going to ask for an investment from anyone else? So, this is very fittingly, my next step. Both Carl and I live in Southern California. Now, with an actual New York production on the horizon, affording travel and living expenses during auditions, rehearsals, and performances will be a challenge and obviously will add up quickly. A \$10,000.00 investment from Ken would really help to relieve the pressure, allowing us to focus on the show itself, meeting other investors, and growing our network on the East Coast. And it may or may not pay off, but here's another thing I've learned. If it doesn't pay off, or even if none of this pans out, I will go back to my little house in Southern California with this thought - Everything will be just fine. I will still love musical theatre, I will still write scenes and songs and whole musicals and maybe even parodies, and I still have a kick-ass recipe for Humus. I just gotta keep it off the keyboard.

Thanks for considering me!