

INNER CIRCLE INVESTMENT CONTEST

Essay by Liz Schiller, writer (book and lyrics), *Look For Me*, www.ptsdthemusical.net

[Reddit PTSD subreddit chat, September 18, 2022]

SadEyedGrrl: So it's for sure. I've got a PTSD diagnosis. I'm not sure where to go from here.

ArmyStrong02: You're in the right place, lots of good people here. And check out *Look For Me* on Amazon, it's pretty cheap to rent. It's a video, there's music, you'll learn some of the basics. Also, you may cry. I'm 6'1" and 210 lbs of solid ex-military muscle, and I cry every time.

[WTF podcast, October 11, 2022]

Marc Maron: Today I'm talking with Liz Schiller, writer of *Look For Me*, the musical movie about healing from trauma. Is that how you'd describe it?

Liz Schiller: That's it exactly. It's a stage musical, but it was filmed and it's available to stream.

MM: Musicals take a long time to develop, don't they?

LS: Yeah. I started writing in early 2013. Ben Wilkins, the composer, came on board in late 2014.

MM: Can you talk about the development process? Is it more solitary, or more collaborative?

LS: A little of both. Like any writer, I start out in a room by myself, but when there's collaboration, that's when you can make things really, really work.

MM: Oh yeah? Like a writers room?

LS: Sometimes, yeah, especially when you get to the production part. And Ben and I would go back and forth with the songs. But I'm thinking more about the feedback I got. I was going through some personal stuff at one point and I set the project aside. Then I did a workshop with an artist named Jessica Abel, it's called Creative Focus, and that put me back on track. It wasn't just the material she presented, although that was very useful, there was also a creative community. We held each other accountable, at least for a while. I also spent time in different writing workshops. Early on, for a bunch of years actually, I went to a songwriting workshop every week. I've been in two different playwrights workshops. And I was part of a group run by Broadway producer Ken Davenport called the Inner Circle.

MM: That sounds fancy and exclusive.

LS: (laughing) Yeah, I guess it was. It was amazing, actually. Most of the writing workshops I've been in, you bring in the work, one song, one scene. The Inner Circle is kind of a big picture experience. Imagine you're in a room with a bunch of other ambitious high-achievers. That definitely lit a fire under my less high-achieving butt. Ken brings in experts who know marketing, producing, fundraising. It was a master class in every aspect of putting on a musical, four times a year. Oh, um, we were also in the room with Tony Award winners every time. I mean, Ken is a Tony winner himself, but wouldn't you like to get the chance to ask the writer of *Driving Miss Daisy* what it was like to work with Morgan Freeman in his first major stage role? (pause) OK, I guess that's actually your job, but it's not something I normally get to do. So, like you said, *Look For Me* is streaming video. I wanted that to happen from the moment I started writing, but there are union rules, Actors Equity says you can't film a stage show. I figured, I'll deal with this eventually, probably I'll have to negotiate with the union somehow, but I worried

about it. What if they say absolutely not, what then? And then one weekend at the Inner Circle, the answer showed up in the person of Paul Gordon. He co-wrote a musical called Daddy Long Legs, and also some other shows, and he had figured out how to film a show and make it available for streaming. That probably saved this project.

MM: I go out and see plays, and musicals too sometimes. I watched Look For Me, and let's face it, it's not your usual sort of musical. I mean, of course there are characters who want something, a couple of them fall in love, but there's also therapy that happens on stage, and a song about the parts of the brain, which was very entertaining, by the way. Was there a moment when you thought, this is going to happen, for real?

LS: There are so many moments when things can go wrong. Even when we were about to film and I was sitting there watching these incredibly talented Broadway actors singing the words I wrote, I thought to myself, well, there could be an earthquake right now and the whole thing won't happen.

MM: You think like that? I do too.

LS: Yeah, if I'm on my way somewhere really, really important, I'm thinking, this is the day I die in a car accident. Anyway, there was one thing that kind of shifted me into the "unstoppable" category. That was when I got this award from Ken Davenport's organization. It was a huge vote of confidence from a Tony Award-winning producer. It's voted on by a whole community of writers and people who care about theater, so it wasn't just from him, it was all these other people saying, this project is worthy and important. It came with a check, which was the first outside money we'd ever gotten. The money went right into the development budget. I mentioned the award in every pitch. I'm sure it was a factor in every other "yes" we got.

MM: You've got a sort of a platform now, right, on mental health issues?

LS: I do. I'm going with a group next week to lobby Congress about the mental health funding provisions in the current health care bill. Oh, and for all your California listeners, there's a bill in the legislature right now that would change how therapists are trained and licensed. It would provide funding for graduate school and especially for internships, which have been unpaid up to now. If the bill passes, the funding will open up counseling as a career to a much wider range of people.

MM: That's crazy, that you have to do an unpaid internship to become a therapist. I mean, big companies aren't allowed to do that anymore. I pay my interns. Hey, I wanted to tell you, my listeners know I've had my ups and downs with therapy, but seeing Look For Me, and I did cry at the end by the way, because I cry at everything, but I'm going to give one of those methods a try that you have in the show.

LS: That's really great. I'm glad to hear that. I wrote the show for you, you know.

MM: For me, specifically?

LS: (laughs) Well, maybe not specifically you. But for all the people who might not read a nonfiction book or a newspaper article, but who might listen to a song or watch a show on TV. Stories get into our heads and, I know this is cheesy, but they get into our hearts. They change how we feel and how we understand. There's an old movie called The Lost Weekend that helped change the conversation about alcoholism. I wanted to do the same for trauma.

MM: Well, Liz, I think that you did.