

## **SECOND CHANCES**

Every once in a while you might get more than one!

By: Scott Wertz

When I was a teenager, I performed in several companies that produced productions of the classic musical, *The Sound of Music*. In two of the cast, I had the opportunity to play the role of Rolf, the teenager who along with the eldest Von Trapp daughter, Liesel, sings the song, "16 going on 17." By the end of the musical, my character ended up fully committed to the Nazi regime and was faced with the choice to either have the family of the girl he was in love with arrested or let Liesel and her family escape the aggressive German Gestapo. Both the movie and stage versions of *The Sound of Music* present different outcomes as to what Rolf decides to do. Ultimately, the Von Trapp family escapes and we never hear about Rolf again. Each year as this timeless musical is re-aired on television, and the Von Trapp family are seen climbing every mountain and forging every hill, I am left with the question, "what happened to Rolf?"

The Inner Circle, under the leadership of Broadway Producer, Ken Davenport, has allowed me and my team to fully jump in, research, and discover some of the answers to "what may have happened to Rolf?" You are probably thinking to yourself, "nothing happened to Rolf! He was a fictional character, along with Liesel and some of the other characters!" And though you would be correct, may I remind you, there is always more to the story. The writing team of Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein gave the world a delightful musical involving a stern captain, his children, a mischievous nun, and an ensemble of made-up characters who sing songs about a lonely goatherd, edelweiss, and raindrops on roses. Being written and performed so close to the end of World War II, *The Sound of Music* brought comfort to people who were still healing from the realities of the war. But what if I were to tell you, there really was a girl who was 16 going on 17, and there really was a teenage boy who was given a second chance; wouldn't you want to know their story?

In 1998, I met a survivor of the Holocaust by the name of Alexandra Madarash Goode. At the time of our first meeting, Mrs. Goode was sixty-nine years old. She recently turned ninety years old back in September of this year. Over the past twenty-one years, I have had the opportunity to travel back and forth to Russia with this remarkable lady to help 224 Russian children and teenagers get adopted by American families. Alexandra and I, along with her husband George, have made over sixty trips back and forth to Russia. On each of the trips, I have been able to interview and hear her inspiring story of a girl who was grabbed in the middle of the night and thrown onto a train cattle car and imprisoned in Dachau, one of Germany's most notorious concentration camps. Taken by the Nazi's for simply being of Russian descent, this young orphaned teenager overcame unbelievable obstacles to the point of nearly dying on several occasions! Enduring two years of unbearable conditions, she along with eleven others escaped in the middle of the night from the nightmare they had survived. Climbing into a cattle car similar to the one they all had arrived in, Alexandra found herself hiding in the same way

Liesel and her family had hidden from Rolf and the German soldiers in the monasteries graveyard at the end of Act II. Only this time, the events and characters in Alexandra's story were real, and the circumstances eerily similar to Roger and Hammerstein's conclusion. For in a single moment, two people came face to face, and one had to make a quick decision that would determine the outcome for the other. Sound familiar? What if each of us were allotted a second chance? Would we learn from our past mistakes, or would we let history repeat itself? Perhaps this story will be motivation for all of us to live life in such a way that we don't need second chances to make things right because we will make the right choices to begin with!

To bring this story to life, my writing partner, Denis Kashoid, and I need to raise funding to finance the next steps required to advance this story to the stage. At the age of ninety, Alexandra is still very active and a part of our journey in the telling of her story. In light of her age, we can not afford to delay in getting this project up and running. But we want to make sure not to miss any of the steps it takes to go from an idea to a fully developed musical that will be shared for many generations to come. Being selected last year to be a part of this year's Inner Circle was a dream come true! We have been able to network and share our ideas and hear from others who are also in the Inner Circle. Every three months, having the opportunity to sit under the instruction and mentorship of Ken Davenport and the talented group of working Broadway professionals he brings to the table each time we meet, has enhanced and advanced our writing and collaboration by leaps and bounds! We have been able to stay the course and press on thanks to the Inner Circle and the Producer's Perspective's constant encouragement and support. This is why we are asking for all of you to vote for our project to receive the \$10,000 investment being offered by Ken Davenport and the Inner Circle Investment Contest.

It is our goal to have a reading and workshop of our musical over this coming summer. In order to do so, we will need to raise funding for the rental of a theatre, support for some of the tech staff, and funding for some of our musicians. We desire to share this story anywhere we are able. Most of my team, including Alexandra, lives in Texas. We are currently looking into the possibility of holding our reading at the new Holocaust and Human Rights Museum that opened in September in downtown Dallas. Then, a possible workshop performance at Ellis Island, where Alexandra first arrived in America in the late 1940s, and where her name is engraved on the immigration wall of honor. If these locations do not pan out, we will be looking at some other immersive spaces and theatres in both Dallas and New York.

Whether we are selected this year for this generous investment into our show, we are honored and thankful to have the opportunity to share with all of you about our project. We look forward to hearing who wins at the Super Conference in November. For more information about *Second Chances*, please visit our website at [www.secondchancesamusical.com](http://www.secondchancesamusical.com).

### *Second Chances*

Books and Lyrics by: Scott Werntz

Music Composed by: Denis Kashoid

Based on the life of Alexandra Madarash Goode