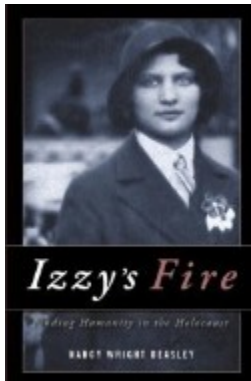


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It's been a full and fulfilling season. Here's some of what has happened in the last three months.

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Nancy Wright Beasley

Author of *Izzy's Fire* and *The Little Lion*

***"... but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not
be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."
– Isaiah 41:30 KJV***

The Little Lion on Stage

It's been a full and fulfilling season. Here's some of what has happened in the last few months:

When Dr. Sara Gillman Pliamm, a Holocaust survivor, stood up on January 30, 2016, opening night of *The Little Lion* at Swift Creek Mill Theatre, it was tantamount to a miracle for me. To see Sara, now 75 and a long-time physician in Canada, was nearly beyond belief.

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Dr. Sara Gillman Pliamm standing on opening night.

I first wrote about Sara when she was a 3-year-old girl, after her parents were forced into Kovno Ghetto in Kaunas, Lithuania, in August, 1941, along with some 30,000 other Jews. I described how she was smuggled out of the ghetto by her uncle, Labaile Gillman, in *Izzy's Fire: Finding Humanity in the Holocaust* and later in *The Little Lion: A Hero in the Holocaust*. In *Izzy*, my first nonfiction book published in 2005, I documented how an extremely poor Catholic farm family saved 13 Jews during the Holocaust, Sara's parents among them.

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Sara Gillman as a young child.



Dr. Sara Gillman Pliamm, left, and her sister Dr. Liuba Gillman Grossman, who was born after the war.

When five other residents of Canada and five from Florida, all descendants of Moshe/Sheina Gillman and Israel/Sheina Gillman, also stood up at the play's end, there were few dry eyes in the audience. It felt as if all the air had been sucked out of the room, until it exploded with applause. Not only was that night rewarding, it was the culmination of over 70 years of history for the Gillman family, as well as my work on the Holocaust, which spans almost two decades.

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Anne E. Derse, former U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania, and Rolandas Krisciunas, current Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S., along with me and the Gillman descendants. On the left is Etty Gillman Bienstock (purple sweater), daughter of Israel and Sheina Gillman; her son and daughter-in-law, Neil Bienstock and Deborah, and their children, Rachel, Samson, and Ryan, who is standing by me. On the right is Dr. Liuba Gillman Grossman, daughter of Moshe and Sheina Gillman and sister to Dr. Sara Pliamm, along with her children, Drs. Bob and Ruth Grossman, as well as Dr. Sara Gillman Pliamm and her daughter, Dr. Naomi Pliamm.

The play, inspired by my historical novel of the same title and adapted for the stage by revered Richmond playwright Irene Ziegler, was optioned in March 2015 by Tom Width, director of Swift Creek Mill Theatre. The book wouldn't be published until 2016. I'd never given a great deal of hope to my work coming to life on the stage. But come alive it did, under the awesome direction of Width and portrayed by a sterling cast and crew of 22. They took their characters to heart so much that sometimes they cried backstage between scenes. Several told me what a powerful effect the story had on their lives and how, along with

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accustomed to portraying. John Hagadorn, who portrayed Dr. Elkes, one of the lead parts in the play, is also a docent at the Virginia Holocaust Museum. John gave several cast members a private tour of the museum, which they said was most beneficial in understanding their characters.



Tom Width, director of Swift Creek Mill Theatre, as well as the artistic director for the world premiere of *The Little Lion*, and I share a moment of jubilation with Irene Ziegler, the playwright who was inspired by my book and adapted it for the stage.

After months of preparation and rehearsals, some cancelled by a fierce snowstorm, *The Little Lion*, opened with a full house. The drama was heightened by words offered before the curtain rose.

Anne E. Derse, former U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania who has tirelessly supported my work since I met her in Lithuania in 2010, spoke on the importance of honoring history and how it needed to be kept alive, even when it's painful to accept. Anne was instrumental in helping me contact Rolandas Krisciunas, current Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States, whom she introduced. He, too, stressed the importance of embracing history and how

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Lithuanian Jews lost their lives during the Holocaust.



Anne E. Derse, U.S. Ambassador to the United States (ret.).



Rolandas Krisciunas, Lithuanian Ambassador to the United States.

The day was a scramble for me, as I had arranged a private tour at the Virginia Holocaust Museum, hosted by Dr. Waitman Boern, executive director of the museum. The tour included Anne, as well as her husband, Hank Hendrickson, also a diplomat, along with Ambassador Krisciunas and his assistant, Evelina Petrone. I also invited Martin Goldman, Director of Survivor Affairs at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and his wife Donna, an elementary school teacher (both now retired), to join us. Martin was helpful to me at the USHMM and has always been very supportive.

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(L-R) Anne Derse, U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania (ret.), Dr. Waitman Boern, Executive Director of the Virginia Holocaust Museum, Rolandas Krisciunas, Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S., Martin Goldman, Director of Survivor Affairs United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (ret.), and I gather under the Holocaust Survivors Memorial Wall following our tour of the multifaceted museum.

Everyone, except Dr. Boern, went to Swift Creek Mill Theatre where I had the privilege of introducing them to Sara, as well as the other descendants of the Gillman family. We enjoyed a sumptuous dinner while viewing magnificent art by Holly Berger Markhoff displayed in the dining room. Tom then gave us a private tour of the refurbished stage area prior to the play beginning.

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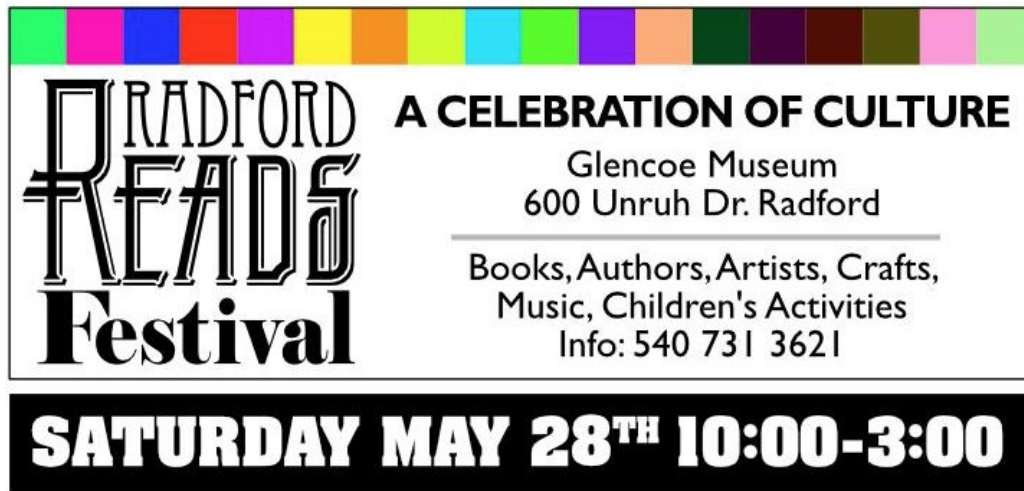
Women's Guild, one of the paintings by Holly Berger Markhoff displayed at Swift Creek during the play performance of *The Little Lion*.

There's too much to tell in a single email. Soon I'll share more about the people who made *The Little Lion* possible. I'll also reflect on the play because I've finally found the words that escaped me when I had tried to express my gratitude to the cast.

Thank you for reading and supporting *The Little Lion*.

Nancy Wright Beasley

Author, Journalist

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On May 28, I'm participating in the [Radford Reads Festival](#), a celebration of local culture featuring local and nationally known authors, artists and craftsmen, with activities for children and music.

This event is special to me, since my mother grew up in Radford, in Floyd County, and I was born there. My father was born and grew up in neighboring Carroll County, so the "mountain" roots go deep for me.

[Radford Reads Festival](#)

Glenco Museum

10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Free

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