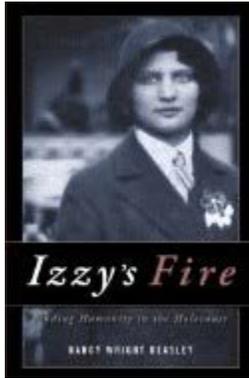


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I'd like to recognize Israel Gillman, Neil November, and more supporters of *The Little Lion* in print and on stage.

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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

Part II

On January 31, 2016, I had the privilege of watching the first matinee of *The Little Lion* with Neil and Sara Belle November, along with their niece, Patricia Low. It was Sara's 88th birthday, so Tom Width, Director of Swift Creek Mill Theatre, brought out a cake with candles aglow and the cast sang to her.

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Sara Belle and Neil November celebrated her 88th birthday at Swift Creek Mill, along with their niece, Patricia Low, on January 31, 2016. We then watched the stage production of *The Little Lion*, which they helped to produce.

Space doesn't permit the listing of countless individuals, friends and work acquaintances who honored me with their presence for opening night. One of the attendees, Gary Creditor, rabbi emeritus of Temple Beth-El in Richmond, said he was rendered "absolutely speechless" by the power of the play. A multitude of theater goers, including many students, echoed his sentiments, several of them crying and hugging me as they did so. Some just hugged me, unable to speak.

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Remnants of leftover snow, that cancelled several rehearsals, are still visible on the bank near the sign announcing the world premiere of *The Little Lion* at Swift Creek Mill Theatre.

I would be remiss not to mention Neil Bienstock individually for his years of assistance with the book and the play.

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Neil Bienstock, grandson of Israel Gillman, has offered priceless assistance on family history over the years.

Neil, the grandson of Mr. Israel Gillman, worked tirelessly, at all hours over several years, to acquire photographs and permissions for me to proceed with the work. Mr. Gillman, now the lone survivor of the Gillman Holocaust story except Sara, is 94 and was unable to travel from Florida due to health issues. Neil described his grandfather's reaction when Mr. Gillman first saw a copy of *The Little Lion*:

“I pulled a chair out for him, since I thought he might be a bit overcome when he saw the book. I expected his reaction to be much stronger than when I read him the manuscript, but even I was surprised. He took the book into his hands, kissed it, held it to his heart and began to cry, before sitting down in the chair. It was such an emotional time for both of us that I immediately called his two children, my mother and aunt, to share it. Since then, my grandfather has not let the book out of his sight. If he's

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awake, the book is on a table beside him. If he's in bed, it's on the bedside table, the cover facing up, toward the same picture of Laibale on the motorcycle, the one that has hung over his bed ever since I can remember."

When Neil described how his grandfather reacted to the book, I cried, too. I can't express enough appreciation for the continuous encouragement from Neil and so many others.



(L-R) Dr. Ruth Grossman, granddaughter of Moshe and Sheina Gillman, returned from Canada with a friend to see *The Little Lion* a second time. Also pictured are John Hagadorn, who portrayed Dr. Elkes in the play; Tom Width, artistic director of the world premiere of *The Little Lion*; and John Mincks, who played the main lead (Laibale Gillman) in the play.

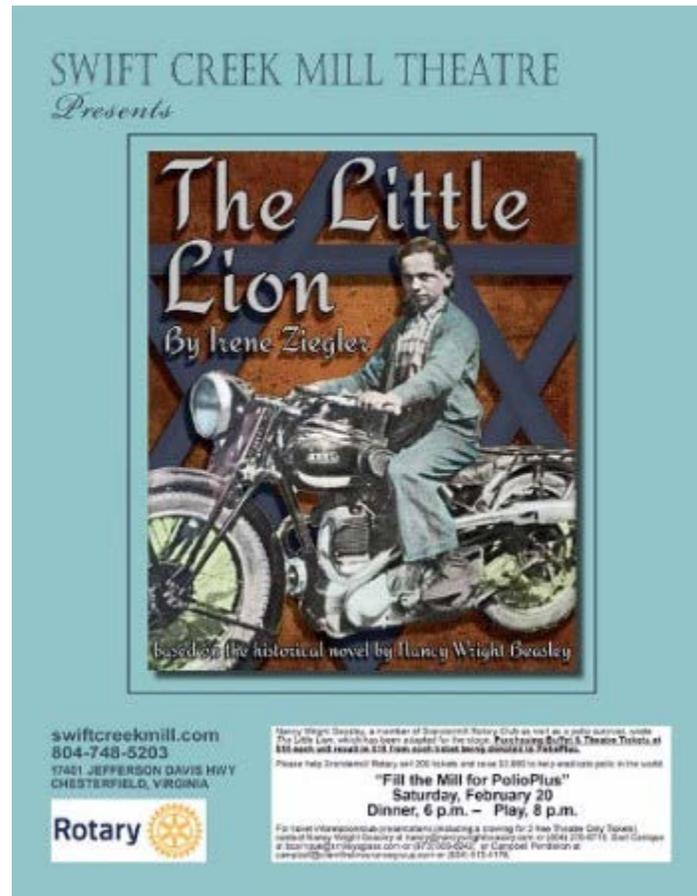


Dr. Bob Grossman, grandson of Moshe and Sheina Gillman and brother of Dr. Ruth Grossman, also came from Canada to see the play a second time and brought his children, Jonelle, Alexis and Zachary.

For six weeks, I spent the majority of the time on the road between my home and Swift Creek. I saw the play numerous times, fulfilling a promise to attend it with several different groups to whom I had spoken about the book and play. There were many special groups who came en masse, but one stands out. My fellow Rotarians at Brandermill Rotary helped me sell tickets to a full house for the February 20 show.

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and, as a polio survivor, I am devoted to that initiative. Officials at Swift Creek agreed to sell me the tickets at a discount, thereby giving me their profit for the night to help “Fill the Mill for PolioPlus.” Numerous groups and individuals helped raise over \$4,700 for PolioPlus.



The flyer advertising "Fill the Mill for PolioPlus."

Numerous groups came to see *The Little Lion*, including members of the Virginia Professional Communicators. They attended on opening night and even brought me my own personal “little lion,” which now graces my office bookshelf.

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Virginia Professional Communicators joined me for a performance of *The Little Lion*. Top row (l-r): Susan Winiecki, Pam Stallsmith; second row: Katherine Calos, Cynthia Price, Bonnie Atwood; third row: Mary Ellin Arch, Sue Bland, Frances Crutchfield; fourth row: Alberta Lindsey, my VPC little lion and me, Sharon Baldacci.

Francis Broaddus-Crutchfield, a local writer and long-time friend of mine, also took my breath away by hosting a book-launching party for *The Little Lion* and a tribute to the play at the Country Club of Virginia on February 13. It was attended by about 250 friends, as well as Tom Width, Irene Ziegler, and several of the play's cast members.

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Inge Horowitz, Lisa Crutchfield, daughter-in-law of Frances Crutchfield, Francis Broaddus-Crutchfield (hostess of the party at the Country Club of Virginia) and I had a great time at the book launching party.

I have never been more proud to share my life with my two sons, Beau and Jason. Maggie, Beau's daughter, also attended. My daughters-in-law were both at home, each with a sick child. I sent them some of the outstanding food. The service was second to none, and presents and flowers piled up next to the guest book. I went home riding on a cloud of good wishes and wondering what I had ever done to deserve such a wonderful tribute.

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My sons Jason (L) and Beau and Beau's daughter, Maggie.

Among the gifts was one from Anita Crean, who knows that Miss Piggy is my idol. Anita, one of three writing group friends who came to the book launching party, had given me a pink T-shirt with Miss Piggy on the front and the saying, "I gotta be Moi" written on it. When my son, Beau, saw it, he laughed and said, "Boy that describes you, for sure!"

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“Moi” wearing my Miss Piggy T-shirt and holding flowers I received during the book launching party from Tom and Martha Steger and Beau and Maggie.

I was also surprised by a special delivery of roses, surrounded by green and gold, the colors of Hollins University, which is where I wrote *The Little Lion* for my thesis that helped earn me an MFA in Children’s Literature. Nancy Gray, president of Hollins University, had wired the flowers, since she couldn’t attend the play. You can see why Hollins’ graduates have such love for their alma mater.

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Nancy Gray, president of Hollins University, sent these flowers on opening night.

Thanks to Jay Paul for many of the CVA photos, to all those mentioned above, and many more. If you missed the story of opening day in my last email, [you can read it here](#). In my next email, I'll reflect on the play because I've finally found the words that escaped me when I tried to express my gratitude to the cast.

Thank you for supporting *The Little Lion*.

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Nancy Wright Beasley

Author, Journalist

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