

A sampling of our stories behind the scenes...

**PLAYS in
DAYS**

BROADCAST



I've always been a huge fan of the Big Band Era's music, dancing, styles, spirit, and people in the "Greatest Generation." My parents were married in 1945 as my dad was being sent off to the war in Germany. They made it through the end of the war and raised twelve children on the music they loved. My parents were great about listening to whatever music we were interested in as long as we listened to theirs, too. So we all grew up loving Benny Goodman, Glen Miller, the Andrews Sisters, Artie Shaw, etc.

As an adult, I have had the wonderful opportunity to perform as part of a vocal trio, Just Like T.H.A.T.! (aka The Swing Sisters or String of Pearls), over a period of 30 years, performing music of that era. During that time, I have truly grown attached to the amazingly well-crafted music, to swing dancing, and of course, I learned how to do the hair, the clothes, the make-up, the lines up the back of the legs for the seamed stocking look – the whole bit! And met wonderful people and brave veterans from the era (and their kids and grandkids) as a bonus.

My six children grew up loving the music mom was constantly rehearsing. So, when the high school where I work was looking for a musical comedy to do, had a tight budget, and a large number of males who wanted to do the musical that year (which as any high school theater director knows is rather unusual), my daughter, Christina, and I thought it would be fun to write a story that took place in the Big Band Era. With the wonderful support of the drama coach there, Scott Phillips, and his openness to doing original plays, we were on our way.

I had written a short play for comedian and radio show host, Al Lohman (of The Lohman and Barkley Show) many years ago that was to feature three jingle girls (us) and him as the head of a 1940s radio show. Although that play was never produced, we loved the name, BROADCAST, so my daughter and I used the name, the radio show setting, and the three jingle girl characters (of course), and came up with an entirely new story with an ensemble cast that fit the talent we had available that year. (Lesson – don't throw away your old writing ideas!!! There may come a day...)

It was so fun to create characters out of thin air and to write this story. Equally fun was the chance to teach the kids about the era, teach them the contagious fun of swing dancing, and impart to them a love of the fantastic music that came out of that time in our history. It was a privilege to tell the kids about all the WWII veterans I have had a chance to meet after my trio's shows. The kids ate up the whole package and had a blast doing this show. Most fun of all was their excitement at the opportunity to bring to life characters that no one had ever met before! It is this cast's voices you hear on the Audio Performance tracks. They grew and learned so much in the process.

Sometimes old-fashioned patriotism goes by the way-side, and we wanted to teach that to the students as well. We held a gala luncheon, very reasonably priced, and invited anyone in the town who loved the era to eat with us and tell us their stories, (or their parents' stories) then watch the matinee. BEST AUDIENCE EVER. The mix of standards from the era and original songs written in the style of the era in our musical made for a delightful experience for our audiences. Sentimental and fresh all at the same time.

Often, you don't know the benefits you are imparting to others while working with a team of people until the plan unfolds. One girl was in happy tears at how much the song, "I Don't Like That Kinda Girl," had been a cathartic help to her dealing with another girl who had treated her badly throughout high school. Another girl had a terrible family situation and said the spirit of this story and the teamwork doing this play gave her hope in people again. Many moments like that made this play special and dear to my heart.

We hope you have as much fun with this show as we did, and that all the (MANY!) organizational tools are of help to you. Use what you want and leave the rest.

Thanks for taking this sentimental journey behind the scenes with us.
Teresa and Christina

The Living Christmas Card



This play was originally written for a married couple, with loads of talent, who really wanted to be a part of a Christmas production. Their personalities and relationship inspired the writing of The Living Christmas Card script and I pictured them and heard their voices in my head the whole time I was writing the story. The script was written using their names, Tom and Kathy, scripts were printed and given out to the cast, I had most of it memorized, (being the diligent director ☺) and we were ready to start our short rehearsal schedule, just days before the show.

Then, that thing that so often happens, happened – something came up at the last minute and Tom and Kathy had to back out!

As with most of our Plays In Days scripts, the show is really held together by the two or three main characters. Yikes! Instead of panic (*only* because this was my umpteenth production and I'd seen God work in these situations countless times before!) I prayed and tried to relax and think of another male and female actor who could pull it off on such short notice – preferably a married couple.

Enter Bob and Sharon! They had met in college music performance class, Bob had been a voice-over guy on the military base near us, and Sharon was a teacher, so I figured they were a natural, professional fit. They were totally excited and didn't cringe, not even one little bit, at the short time they would have to pull this together. They quickly crossed out "Tom" and "Kathy" and wrote their own names in ("so we won't be confused") and off they went to have a blast creating their characters. Even at the first rehearsal, they were entertaining, apparently evidence of their years of performing experience. Since time was so short, they cut key cues and lines out of their copies of the script and pasted them to the back of props in the trunk, in case they forgot lines. They didn't really need to read them, but the "security blanket" was a big help. (hint, hint...)



The show was terrific and the rest of the cast loved working with Bob and Sharon. When the show was over, I thanked them for their true professionalism and for bringing their characters to life far better than I had imagined.

“Better than we imagined too!” They said. “This was our first play ever!”

What!? Coulda fooled everyone! Inspired by the fun experience, they’ve since gone on to bless many community theater productions with their talents and they are the voices of Grandma and Grandpa on the audio performance recordings of this play which was on nationwide radio last Christmas. We tell God our plans and he laughs, let’s us get to a point where we feel things can’t possibly go right, gives us the willingness to trust him anyway - then blesses us better than we could have imagined!

Thanks for joining me on this little “Behind the Scenes” journey.

Teresa

CSI: BABYLON The Evidence Never Lies



Our pastor was going through the book of Daniel and we were coming to the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. He mentioned that they were inspected head to toe when they survived the fiery furnace. As the Bible tells us “Not even a smell of smoke was found on their clothing.” I pondered the wonder of that the next Saturday night while leaning back in my car seat waiting for my son’s college football game to start.

I sat up with a start as the crazy idea came to me – What IF? What would happen if crime-solving methods and agents from our world intersected with the world of King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, 1100 BC? And wouldn’t that make a really cool idea for a play? Bet the youth would love doing it and their parents would totally get it. But doing it for church? Hmm... I wasn’t so sure how that would go over. I mean, do (other) Christians even watch CSI? I tried to talk myself out of it, but...

The next morning, to my surprise, our pastor quoted a line from a CSI episode, “The evidence never lies,” and said if modern day investigators had been doing the forensics, there would have been no “trace” evidence whatsoever that the three men had been anywhere near a fire.

“It’s a sign!” I thought to myself, and I couldn’t wait for the service to end so I could broach the subject of my play idea. God always seems to validate things in that way with me. First comes the idea or desire to serve in a certain way, then, the invitation or opportunity to do exactly that comes in some unexpected manner. Anyway, my pastor loved the contemporary idea and courageously took a chance, and, CSI: BABYLON was born, the first in a series of CSI Bible Land plays and playlettes which continue to be published to this day.

I’m grateful for the opportunity my pastor gave me and I’ve had a blast writing and producing the plays, several with my daughter, Christina Haemmerle, and our CSI JR. series has been published in a well known children’s magazine for several years. We’ve made all the CSI Bible Land plays and playlettes available on the Plays In Days website. Exciting stuff and we hope you enjoy them as much as we do.

So if God is giving you a cool idea that would honor him, or manifest his character, or help people know him better, don’t talk yourself out of it just because it’s unique or “crazy.” Be watching for the invitation to bring it to fruition! He blesses his inspirations and dreamers in amazing ways.

Thanks for joining me on this little “Behind the Scenes” journey,
Teresa

The Emperor's New Clothes
a musical comedy adaptation of
Hans Christian Anderson's tale



I have always been enthralled by the wonderful stories by Hans Christian Anderson. The Emperor's New Clothes was one of the most intriguing because it tugged at my conscience. Would I be like the Emperor's "groupies" and lie and say I could see the wonderful new suit of clothes? Were the tailors the bad guys for playing on everyone's weaknesses and pride? Or were they the good guys for finally exposing the Emperor's haughtiness and self-centered folly? Did they feel good about it later? Did the kingdom suffer and then improve after the folly was exposed? There were so many hidden stories that could be imagined about everyone, including the Emperor.

In 1995, our little traveling play troupe (which consisted of me, our sixteen year old daughter, Christina, and her theater friend Cindi – two very talented young actors/singers/directors) had pretty successfully produced our very first Plays In Days production of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* in several elementary schools. We were happy with the experience and had learned a lot, so I was looking for another story idea for a subsequent production. The schools all wanted us back, so we were highly motivated. But what story to use? It had to be one where extra characters could be infused to accommodate the dozens of kids who would be trying out for the plays.

My husband and I were in the thick of raising our combined family of six children – his, mine, and ours, all born in a span of eight years. Trips to the library became a regular outing. One rainy day, I sat in our van with five of the six kids, not wanting to go home to piles of laundry (having six kids, plus having grown up with eleven siblings and being my mom's laundry helper, you can imagine why). In no rush, I put in the audio tape that went

with an illustrated version of *The Emperor's New Clothes* we had just checked out. The opening instrumental theme music – a piece I've never been able to identify – instantly sparked my imagination and lyrics started coming to me right away (“He is, he is the Emperor of Washingland”), as did the laundry theme, the extra characters, and the added story lines for them. I was so excited that Christina and I started work on the play right away (after doing the laundry, of course). As soon as we had the story built, we invited Cindi over to add her humorous and clever input and the children's version of *The Emperor's New Clothes* musical comedy was born.

Our local theater costume lady was making room in her storage and sold me some kingly clothes at a pauper's price and the Emperor was attired! Choosing to dress everyone else simply or in modern clothes worked great to contrast the Emperor's lifestyle with everyone “under” him. As often happens with me, I went thrift store shopping and came up with the ideas of the other characters and how they would look. Two brightly colored leisure suits inspired the idea for the Doubleknit Twins and a court Jester hat inspired Stitches and the Jokers. We made a simple Washingland Palace backdrop out of king size sheets. We re-covered our cloth covered movable pvc pipe frames from Goldilocks to look like palace gates on one side and the royal dressing room on the other, and we had a show!

The play was produced in a few elementary schools as well as at our local community theater with Christina and Cindi as Sewphia and Stitches, respectively, also acting as directors along with me. The play met with good success, mostly I think because audiences were very curious to see how we would handle the Emperor not wearing any clothes! And how would we tell the story of the tailors and the “magic cloth?” I think the solutions we came up with were more than satisfactory, and audiences love the story as we've tried to re-tell it, filling in some of the blanks about the Emperor's royal subjects.

Several years later, I was working in the musical theater department of our high school. We had a small number of actors available, mostly very talented girls, and a very small budget that year. I suggested we could do one of my originals for no royalties if I could be afforded the time and just a little money to “grow up” the script and costumes. We added Tempa Cheer and Missy Buttons to spread out the lead parts of Stitches and Sewphia which made rehearsals go even faster. It also gave us the option to make Stitches a girl who had a life-long friendship (well, maybe more than a

friendship) with the Emperor, and to make the Secretary her competition, complicating matters and making for a more grown-up story.

Of course, high school kids want cool sounding music, so a few extra songs were added and tracks were created to give the show a more full sound. In that production our Jokers also played the Moths, the Wardrobe Assistants, *and* the Laundry Servants – fastest costume changes ever, but this talented group was up for the challenge and they did it! Our only actor younger than high school students was the director Scott Phillips' seven-year-old son, Jacen, who played the Honest Child. The older kids totally adopted him and he had a blast in his first ever production. He also, still being a kid yet to lose his fanciful imagination, helped the teenagers with their pantomimes of working with imaginary cloth.

There are lots of lessons in Hans Christian Anderson's tale and the plays for both children and young adults work well to impart these lessons to those who perform and those who watch. Plus, everyone knows how to sort laundry by the end of the Act 1. 😊

Thank you for joining us on this journey behind the scenes of The Emperor's New Clothes.

Teresa



Talk Stew – Episode 1.
The Fight Against PMA (Positive Mental Attitude)



Talk shows always have been a big part of television and radio and always will be. For a ladies' retreat whose theme was thinking on the good things of God, we thought it would be fun to show a talk show hostess, Oafla Wimpy, with the exact opposite agenda – wiping out positive mental attitude. Taking our scripture verse, Philippians 4:8, we came up with characters whose goal it was to concentrate on everything *but* the things mentioned in that verse.

Our funniest character actress was a little lady in her late 60s, 4'11" in a black robe with a gavel almost as big as her forearm, playing Judge Rudey. The ladies at the retreat had a blast with this play and the message was clear. The world is out to distract us terribly from the good things of God but he and his word are more powerful. Positive mental attitude is easy when you think on God and renew your mind with his word. And Oafla's guests hate it when we do that...

We hope you have as much fun with this play as we did. It went over so well, we're looking forward to writing and performing more episodes in the future.

Blessings,

Teresa

Remember Christmas?



The musically talented people in our church were excited to “throw something together” for Christmas and we needed a vehicle to do that. I had seen an early TV Christmas special (they start about the same time the Halloween pumpkins and Christmas trees are both on sale at Wal-Mart, don’t they?). I started thinking about what goes on behind the scenes of the people hosting/creating the shows. Do they believe what they’re promoting? Do they feel the reason for the season? Or is it all about the money and the sponsors? I imagined a restless, unwilling host forced to put on the special and hating it, and the idea for *Remember Christmas?* was born.

I prefer not to just have a variety show because I think a story gets the message across with more impact. So, with the idea of using what talent was available, being flexible with the script, but still having believable main characters with whom audience members could empathize, we set about gathering acts and some history for each song for Ms. Noel’s laptop. Now, to find some terrific business-like adults to play the main characters...

At the time of the writing of this play, I no grown-ups who wanted to act in it. There seemed to be a lot of musical talent at our church at the time, including people who could play our hand bells but they were reluctant to “do a real play.”

“Me? Say lines? No way! I’d be too embarrassed!”

Which is funny because nothing says, “hide me now” like being the one player who plays the right bell at the wrong time. But there were two families with four very talented pre-teen children. We only had a couple of weeks to put something together, so I took a chance on the four pre-teens who really wanted the chance to play grown-up parts. They were totally up for bringing these characters to life.

The young lady, Ashley, who played Ms. Noel the first time, was only eight years old. We dressed her up in a business type suit, put her hair in a French twist, added a little make-up, some fake glasses, and presto - she became a sophisticated young woman. She did a great job and it was fun to bring her back as Ms. Noel when she was fifteen and again for the Plays In Days Audio Performance of this play at age eighteen.

One of our young people, Jake, was a boy of twelve who played Tony Blank and did a fabulous job convincing everyone he was a disgruntled twenty-something. Jake actually wrote the “Grandpa’s Nativity” song that is featured in the play and that sparked the script’s story line of Mr. Blank finally remembering Christmas. The song is based on Jake’s real experiences with his grandfather growing up. Several years later his little sister, Aimee, then sixteen, played Toni Blank and brought a totally different feel to the play, being a female. Aimee starred in our Play In Days Audio Performance recording at age eighteen and is also featured as Sarai in our CSI plays and others.

The part of Mr. Christy was played by Ashley’s big sister, Alyssa, in our first production, but was played by a young teen boy, Wade, in our second. Again, a totally different feel was brought to the play. You can bet these four kids went on to inspire me and do many more productions, including playing lead parts in school and community theater productions.

I’m sure your production will have its own flavor as you cast and feature different talents and configurations. And who knows what budding talent you may bring to the surface. I have learned not to hesitate to giving young people a chance to stretch. Enjoy this “vehicle” as it enables your talented folks to serve others this season by bringing them a fresh version of *Remember Christmas?*

Blessings,

Teresa