

Out of the Shadow Productions

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NEWS

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New Play Honors Life and Legacy of South African Activist Helen Suzman ...Jewish Community Center in Manhattan to Host Reading on March 30

Glen Ridge, N.J. – During the darkest decades of segregated South Africa, Helen Suzman was the voice of moral conscience for the country’s apartheid parliament. Suzman’s convictions, outspokenness and advocacy for the disadvantaged and disenfranchised propelled her into an unplanned 36-year career as a member of parliament that began in 1953. She was the lone voice of the opposition Progressive party for 13 years of her tenure, clearly and firmly challenging the government’s racist policies and holding its elected officials to account in daily proceedings. Retiring from parliament in 1989 at the dawn of true South African democracy, she continued to advocate for better conditions and opportunities for its black citizens until her death on New Year’s Day this year, at the age of 91.

Twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, Suzman was internationally recognized and honored for her enduring contributions. Now, a new play written by Nadine Bernard aims to bring the story of this courageous woman to a wider U.S. audience. *The Way to Summer* tackles issues of racism, sexism, and anti-Semitism as it probes the need to look within ourselves to combat the seeds of prejudice and intolerance. The Jewish Community Center in Manhattan will host the first formal reading of the play on Monday, March 30, at 7:00 pm. The JCC is located at 334 Amsterdam Avenue at 76th Street. Jon Michael Johnson, manager of the SoHo Playhouse in Manhattan, will direct the performance. The audience is invited to participate in a talk-back with the director, actors and playwright following the reading. There is a suggested donation of \$10 for the reading, and tickets are available in advance from JCC’s box office at 646-505-5708 and website at <http://www.jccmanhattan.org/category.aspx?catid=1022&pID=1000>.

The two-act play spans more than five decades of turbulence and transformation in the modern saga of South Africa. The first act focuses on Helen Suzman's perseverance and fight against oppression, following her career from economics professor to public life, along with stresses on her family life from her long-distance political career and unflagging support from her husband Moses. The first act also follows the struggles of Dumisani, a Black South African who supports Suzman and helps motivate her at difficult times to continue her lonely quest. When he is imprisoned for breaking Apartheid pass laws, Dumisani's hope in the face of adversity and his love of music help him endure his suffering.

For a country to heal from years of oppression, change must take place at the personal level in tandem with the political. *The Way to Summer* explores this theme through the characters of two young women who are college students and admirers of Suzman during the final years of Apartheid. Rachel is Jewish and an anti-Apartheid activist. Klara is an Afrikaner who accepts Apartheid but is oppressed by her culture's sexist values. The second act centers around them in the year 2005 dealing with the aftermath of Apartheid on their personal lives. Their unexpected relationship, struck by a chance meeting on an unemployment line, leads to collaboration on organizing a multi-cultural arts festival – and ultimately to events revealing deep prejudices and the courage, patience and forgiveness it takes to release them.

The genesis of *The Way to Summer* was the author's trip to South Africa in 2005 to visit a childhood friend and long-time pen pal. A visit to the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town provided Nadine Bernard's first introduction to Helen Suzman's amazing life story, which inspired the play. Developing primary resources for the play included email correspondence between Suzman and the author.

A graduate of Cornell University and Sarah Lawrence College, Nadine Bernard is an actor and writer. She is the artistic director and founder of Out of the Shadow Productions, established in 2005. Its mission is to produce stories of recovery, self-discovery, transcendence and hope that bridge differences among people based on life stages, circumstances and cultures. Its ultimate purpose is to break down boundaries of prejudice, stigma and intolerance.

Ms. Bernard is also the writer, director and producer of *In the Shadow of My Son*, a two-act play about new mothers suffering from postpartum depression (PPD). The play educates audiences while reassuring those suffering from the disorder that they are not alone. Integrating broader cultural views on motherhood, it also affirms the vital concept of community as a force for acceptance and support. The 90-minute play has been performed at the 2007 International Fringe Festival in New York, and in New Jersey, nationally and in Canada for numerous healthcare provider audiences. A 45-minute one-person show of excerpts, which Ms. Bernard will perform for grand rounds at hospitals beginning autumn 2009, is also available to other organizations.

For information about booking *The Way to Summer* or *In the Shadow of My Son*, readers may contact:
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