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THE NEWSPAPER WITH A COSMOPOLITAN ATTITUDE

ONE DOLLAR

Playwright Tells Story of Nazi-Era Survivor

BY PEG EASTMAN

Playwright Beth Lincks, a visiting professor at the College of Charleston's School of the Arts, commutes between Charleston and New York City. She also travels back in time with her students via letters written by a courageous Jewish girl about the hopes and horrors of Nazi labor camps. The result will be a play about the teenager's remarkable story of survival that will debut in April.

Lincks, who has several other commissions in the works, entitles this play *Letters to Sala: A Young Woman's Life in Nazi Labor Camps*, based on the book *Sala's Gift* by Ann Kirschner. Lincks said she was particularly gratified that the late-Larry Sacharow asked her to dramatize this highly evocative story.

The Storyline

Letters to Sala is about courage, love and suffering during the dark days of Jewish persecution in Poland during World War II. Sala Garncarz was 16 when she offered to take her older sister's place in Geppersdorf, a labor camp where Jewish men con-

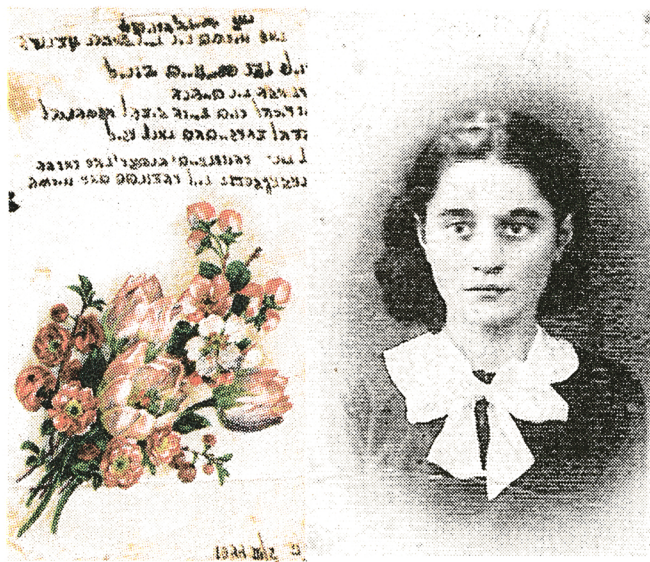
structed an autobahn and Jewish women worked in the laundry and kitchen. Sala's family was poor and the idea of bringing home money seemed like an adventure. So she left for a paying job that was supposed to last only a few months.

The "temporary" employment stretched into five long years during which Sala was forced to work in seven camps in Germany,

Poland and Czechoslovakia. She also befriended the celebrated Ala Gerner, who helped in the only armed uprising at Auschwitz. Gerner was publicly hanged shortly before the camp was liberated and later was immortalized in Israel for her bravery.

To improve morale, the Nazis created a semblance of normalcy by allowing the laborers to receive censored correspondence from the world they left behind. Sala received more than 300 letters that were either mailed or smuggled into the camps. Remarkably, she preserved her precious letters by risking her life — sometimes hiding them during line-ups, handing them to friends or burying them. Knowing through the Jewish faith that words have the power to give and sustain life, preserving the correspondence became inextricably linked with preserving Sala's own life — especially after the labor camps were converted into concentration camps.

Upon liberation by the Soviet Army in 1945, Sala was able to locate her two surviving sisters in Sweden. Nothing was the same after the war, for much of Sala's family had perished, her young love had married another and within a year she married Sidney Kirschner, an American soldier who brought his "war bride" home to the United States. Like many Holocaust survivors, Sala tried to put the past behind her and did not speak of those terrible



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON
(Left) First page of a 14-page diary that started the day of deportation of Sala Garncarz in 1940. (Right) Portrait of Sala Garncarz, age 12.

Nazi-Era Survivor Story Basis of *Letters to Sala*

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years to her American family. But she hid the letters in a box for almost five decades.

In 1991 Sala surprised her grown daughter, Ann, telling of the letters just before undergoing triple bypass heart surgery. Ann Kirschner, dean of Macaulay Honors College of CUNY, wrote about them in *Sala's Gift: My Mother's Holocaust Story*. Her book was an immediate success and has been translated into Polish, German, French, Italian, Mandarin Chinese and, by March 2012, Czech.

Lincks and Her Students

Adaptation of this amazing story into a play is a work in progress. The evolving script provides a workshop experience for the college's theatre students, who are experiencing how a new play is developed. They are also interacting with New York-based director Eric Nightengale, who has done



Playwright, Beth Lincks.

Arlene Hutton's *The Nibroc Trilogy* for Off-Broadway.

"This unprecedented opportunity has blown me away," student Jessica Dick, the play's assistant director, said. "It is a thrilling prospect to work with someone of Eric Nightengale's reputation."

In preparation for the the-

atrical production, the Addlestone Library and the College of Charleston's Department of Theatre presented the highly acclaimed traveling exhibition of Sala's letters from the New York Public Library Dorot Jewish Division, made possible through the Quattlebaum Visiting Artist Fund. The

exhibition includes facsimiles of the Sala letters and an explanation of what was happening as they were written. The exhibition was a backdrop for Linck's pre-production lecture at the Addlestone Library about how the play came to be written. An abbreviated version of the exhibition will be in the lobby of the Emmett

Robinson Theatre when the play is performed in April.

Lincks, the Playwright

Born in Louisiana, Lincks has family roots deep in the Kentucky countryside. She was raised and educated in Florida. After college, she earned her master's of fine arts degree at Florida State

University/Asolo Conservatory for actor training in Sarasota before going to New York to pursue a stage career. Although she never intended on to become a playwright, she began writing under the pseudonym Arlene Hutton.

Her plays have been presented Off-Broadway, in regional theatres, in London and at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. In addition to writing plays, she has taught at Fordham University and the Sewanee Writers Conference.

Nearly two years ago, the

College of Charleston invited her for a one-year visiting professor position teaching playwriting for the School of the Arts. One year led to two, and now she is in her fourth semester — one her students will long remember.

Peg Eastman recently published "Old Charleston Originals From Celebrities to Scoundrels" by History Press. She may be reached at peg-knowledgetech@msn.com

The play will be presented April 14-19 at the Emmett Robinson Theatre at the College of Charleston. For more information, including ticket sales, please contact 843-953-6306.