

The Story of My Life

The Story of The Story by Brian Hill

Sitting in a darkened theater, it's easy to believe that the story unfolding in front of you came trippingly out of the writer's pen and onto the page fully formed. If the creators have done their work, none of the ink, sweat, and tears that went into the writing will be apparent. But every musical goes through a long process of writing and rewriting on its way to a full production. The challenge is even greater when that musical is an original story with infinite possibilities to choose from, rather than an adaptation of an existing story.

The Story of My Life began as a casual conversation between composer/lyricist Neil Bartram and me about childhood friends. We found that we had both had friendships that profoundly shaped our lives, often without our realizing until long after the friendship had grown, waned or, in some instances, ended. As we compared experiences, it seemed that somewhere in those friendships was a story worth telling. So, after sifting through the infinite possibilities, we began shaping the story of a friendship between a man named Alvin and a woman named Rosemary.

Alvin was a free-spirited fellow who, in the first draft, ended up running a restaurant. Rosemary was an advice columnist who ... well ... we never really got a handle on Rosemary. She was a sweet girl but no matter what we did, she kept falling in love with Alvin. Eventually the hero and heroine will insist on singing a love duet whether you want them to or not. But it wasn't a love story we were after; it was a friendship. So we began rewriting. Alvin survived, undergoing only a small career change in the process. Rosemary, I'm sad to say, did not. She underwent a little dramaturgical surgery and became Thomas, also a writer but not of the Dear Abby sort.

Once we introduced Alvin to Thomas, things started percolating. Suddenly those dynamics unique to a male friendship came into play. Suddenly the male ego stood in the way of expressing feelings. Suddenly we had a lot more work to do. *The Story of My Life* had always been conceived as a collection of stories but many of those stories had to be jettisoned to make way for Thomas. Others stayed and were overhauled. Some songs were cut. Others were rewritten. Four opening numbers came and went. Scenes and songs that we held dear to our hearts were thrown away. It was like saying goodbye to old friends but it had to be done.

When we felt confident that there was something to reveal, we held a series of readings and showcases. Two wonderful things came out of those presentations. The first was an introduction to the folks at Goodspeed. The second was a production of *The Story of My Life* at CanStage in November of 2006. It was great to see the show on its feet to see what we had. Of course, seeing what we had meant more rewrites, more cuts and more opening numbers. It was for a forty-minute showcase at the NAMT Festival of New Musicals in October 2007 that we approached Richard Maltby, Jr. about the piece. Richard had heard some of the material when he and his writing partner David Shire led a master class for the BMI Writers' Workshop and his words of encouragement had stayed with us through all those revisions. We were delighted when he agreed to jump on board as director. It's because of that showcase that we're here at Goodspeed and you're reading this. Naturally, there's been more reworking of the script and rewriting of songs to prepare for this production. In fact, there's every chance that you'll hear a song or a scene that was written only last week or even yesterday.

Though little remains of that first draft (only fragments of three of the original songs survived) our hope is that, as you watch, you believe that this story came trippingly out of our pens and onto the page fully formed with no indication that Alvin once ran a restaurant or Thomas was once a woman. In fact we hope that the only ones who really know how far this story has come are me, Neil, and an advice columnist named Rosemary.