

Maia Danziger

Permission to Engage in Joy

Maia was eleven years old and a student at Hunter Junior High School when she first started studying with Muriel at the 92nd Street Y. A friend's mother paid for her to take classes. She later became a babysitter in order to pay for the classes which she attended for the next 4 or 5 years.

Editor's note: Maia's remembrances were a poetic stream of consciousness, weaving a story line of enchantment and delight that began in 1962 and continues into the present.

"It's the room, the little room, the little stage, the theater", The Studio Theater with its' proscenium arch and wings where the Tuesday acting classes were held and where the annual plays of The Production Workshop were rehearsed and performed that she so remembers.

And It was the stories that she remembers so well, the pure stories, the pure imagination that Muriel elicited from Maia. "Pure imagination, pure stories ... imagination and stories. It was free and joyous, no rules, no limits. It was not a selfish act to act, it was a gift to give, an honoring of expression; an opening of a door and permission to engage in joy." It had a deep influence on her work as an actress and as a teacher of writing. "It was psychologically healthy and safe. An incredible gift," she said.

She remembers working on *The Happy Prince* by Oscar Wilde. "High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of The Happy Prince" Maia played the Prince. "He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold" and also played the Swallow and the Reed, ('Shall I love you?' said the Swallow to the Reed) and all the other characters, every part, over and over and she never got tired of playing those characters, never. "She never stopped me. As long as I wanted to get up. It went on for years. It was creatively true. It was beautiful, a giving of yourself, the meaning of life.

"I would love to go back to her class. That would be heaven."

In *Madeline's Rescue* by Ludwig Bemelmans, Muriel cast Maia as Genevieve the Dog, and it was the dog who saved Madeline in a daring rescue. The show was performed throughout New York City. "It was a big moment for me, because after the show, all the kids wanted to meet me."

In The Production Workshop, Maia performed in:

The Prince Who Learned Everything Out of Books, Year 1963, a musical fairy tale, as the second daughter of Queen Chucharumbo, which ended with this song:

*Have faith in your own fairy tale
Have faith that your own dreams won't fail
But will prevail
But will prevail*

This account has a story book ending, because as of this writing, Maia is engaged to be married to Michael Pressman who played the Ogre in *The Prince Who Learned Everything Out of Books* and as she herself said:

"You just never know how the stories are going to end. If you believe in them, fairy tales do come true."