

VINEYARD GAZETTE

Current Edition: Friday, June 4, 2010

Ruin My Life? Not This Mom's Play

BY KATE FEIFFER

The following journal chronicles Vineyard author Kate Feiffer's experience on the making of the new play My Mom Is Trying to Ruin My Life, which is having a workshop production at the Vineyard Playhouse on June 11, 12, 18 and 19. M.J. Bruder Munafo, who is also directing, adapted the book to stage.

July 1, 1998: Motherhood began two weeks later than expected. Now that my daughter has been born, I can say with confidence that I will be a cool mom.

One day in October, 2006: It felt like winter this morning, but the sun made a surprise appearance and the temperature started to soar. Naturally, I started to worry that my daughter would be too warm in her sweatpants, so I surprised her and showed up at school with a pair of shorts for her to change into. She didn't look terribly pleased to see me. It turns out cool moms don't bring shorts to school in the middle of the day.

One day later in October, 2006: I've started writing a book about the things that parents do that embarrass their children. If I am not going to be a cool mom, then at least I will be a published mom.

March 24, 2009: My Mom Is Trying to Ruin My Life has finally been published. Diane Goode's inspired illustrations fit the story perfectly. I am happy enough to sing.

April 29, 2009: I'm on the road with three new books, including My Mom Is Trying to Ruin My Life. The economy is tanking and schools are closing due to fears of a



swine flu (later to be called H1N1) pandemic. I have dubbed this my swine flu recession book tour.

September 6, 2009: I have a fantastic chat today at the Artisan's Festival with M.J. Bruder Munafu, the artistic director of the Vineyard Playhouse. It goes something like this.

Me: Hi M.J. What about adapting one of my books for a play?

MJ: Fine —

Me: (Interrupting) Really?

MJ: Yes, I'm fine. You asked how I am, right?

Me: Actually, I said 'Why don't you adapt one of my plays for the playhouse?' and you said, 'Fine.'

MJ: I did?

Me: Yes, you did

Then I slip a copy of My Mom is Trying to Ruin My Life, which I just happen to be holding, into her bag. I leave the Artisans Festival humming Give My Regards to Broadway.

October 15, 2009: M.J. and I meet at the Black Dog Café for coffee. She has written the first seven pages of the play. I read it and leave the Black Dog singing There's No Business Like Show Business.

December 18, 2009: They keep using words like arctic to describe today's temperature. I stand in front of the playhouse waiting for M.J. until I can't remember what my fingers feel like, then head back to my car whimpering I Dreamed a Dream. After I get home, I find out that M.J. has been waiting for me in the warmth of the Black Dog Café.

March 26, 2010: M.J. and I met today at my house. We decided to workshop the play on June 11, 12, 18 and 19 and have performances during the school day for the elementary schools. When our meeting ends, I waltz M.J. to the front door while singing, 'They say the neon lights are bright on Broadway...'

April 7, 2010: M.J. asks a group of actors she's worked with before, some of them very recently in the Fourth Grade Theatre Project, to come to the playhouse and do a cold reading of the play. This was the first time we hear it out loud. This is the part of the process where we are supposed to be able to tell if the play is working or not. I guess I am too excited or nervous or concerned that everyone had gotten a chocolate chip cookie to be able to tell if the play is working or not. This process is a mystery.

Cookies were good though.

May 5, 2010: We hold auditions today and come to the conclusion that there are too many talented children on this Island. The play only has three parts for children. This will be tough.

May 6, 2010: We schedule callbacks for today and decide that because of the too many talented children issue, M.J. will write in more parts. Relief.

June 1, 2010: Today is the first day of rehearsals and we have a read-through of the entire play. The cast is phenomenal. Danielle Hopkins, a fifth grade student at the Martha's Vineyard Public Charter School, is playing the lead role. She has incredible comic timing and a sparkling stage presence. The brilliant and truly hilarious Chelsea McCarthy is playing the role of mom. Others in the cast include: Xavier Powers, Samantha Cameron, Belle Dinning, Samuel Graber-Hahn, Angela Hayes, Christopher Kann, Jill Macy, Sophia McCarron, Raven McCormack, Emily Moore, James Robinson, Adam Petkus, Ciara Seccombe and James Seccombe. I may be a bit biased, but after the reading I came to the conclusion that this may be the most talented cast ever assembled. It is pouring outside by the time we finish. I leave the playhouse, and needless to say, I am Singing in the Rain.