

# Self-made playwright comes to Yorktown

BY GINO DE ANGELIS  
STAFF WRITER

Elise Milner has had a passion for writing since she was very young. The self-starting playwright and founder of Hanging Cow Productions, whose newest play “Angels Among Us” will have a run at the Yorktown Stage from October 6 to 9, started journaling when she was in primary school.

“I would sit down and write twice as much as the average student in class and take my assignments extra far,” she said. “I became a little entrepreneur when I was 12 and I did a little magazine.”

Milner moved to Cortlandt Manor last year, and has been writing, directing, and producing off-Broadway plays since 2002, with the satirical musical “The Black Cracker,” which she produced after the theater company she was a part of closed down after only two shows.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ELISE MILNER  
Milner and her stage manager  
Suzanne Lynn.

“We did all original work and tried to produce other people’s brand-new scripts,” Milner said. “Then the whole thing folded, and I said, ‘You know what, I’m going to kind of do what these guys did,’ but just do it better and try to keep it going.”

While some writers choose to study for years before getting into the industry, Milner, who did not come from a wealthy background, decided to supplement her education with hands-on experience. During and between the

community college classes she would take when she could afford them, she would work with theater groups, write and direct for television, work with acting groups, and was even a production assistant for Universal Studios in Los Angeles.

“I found a production assistant job, I basically walked on the lot, this totally clueless kid with a ton of ambition and said, ‘Hey, hire me, I don’t care what production company, I want to work in TV, give me some experience, I will do whatever, I don’t even need to get paid,’” she said.

Milner has now produced 15 original shows in the intervening 20 years, but “Angels Among Us” is her own personal comeback story. Her 15th play, “Ascension Underground,” had been rehearsing for seven weeks before Covid was considered a public emergency in March 2020.

SEE MILNER PAGE 9

MILNER  
FROM PAGE 8

“When Covid shut down my 15th play in 2020, I had no idea if I would ever get to do theater again. I am not an artist that does this part-time, and I don’t have big investors to fund my shows,” she said. “I have to raise every dime myself.”

Afraid that live theater would never come back in the way it existed before the pandemic, Milner and her husband went to stay with her mother on her farm in Kentucky for three months while the initial quarantine period took place. Upon her return to New York, she started doing whatever work she could, including graphic and web design and making custom dolls.

“I made custom Barbie dolls for people as gifts, very high end, beautiful replicas of dolls that I created. Anything creative that I could do to get the income flowing again,” Milner said. “And that worked, which was great.”

Once 2021 came, Milner saw that with things

calming down and she might be able to work in the industry she has dedicated so much of her life to. She even received a text from an audience member who had seen a show of hers years earlier asking her not to give up.

“While I was talking about when to put on a show again, and if I should do it, and when to do it, this text comes in and says, ‘Hi, I saw one of your shows in 2018. I’m really hoping that the pandemic didn’t wipe out your production company, because the play I saw was really great, and I’m just sending this in hopes that you do other work, and if you do, please put me on your mailing list,’” she said.

This year’s play, “Angels Among Us,” is one of her favorites, due to the personal connections between the characters it showcases and what it means to her at this time.

“It is truly a joyous comeback in so many ways,” Milner said. “There’s just something really beautiful about those connections and how they all go together like puzzle pieces.”