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Exceptional! — *The Los Angeles Times*... Can this be entertaining? You bet — *Variety*...

It offers something rare in theatrical, literary and human terms: revelation. — *The Irish Times*

REBECCA SCHULL

# JOURNEY INTO THE WHIRLWIND

**1937:** Journalist, teacher and writer Eugenia Ginzburg is at home with her husband and two children when she is summoned to an interrogation. She is unaware that this will begin a journey into the whirlwind — the Stalinist purges of the Communist Party. What followed was a sentence of 18 years in prison, solitary confinement, torture and slave labor in the gulag. Rebecca Schull's performance reveals a woman curious about all of life, ready to perceive humor in the worst of situations — a woman who can still love, hate and retain belief in human nature.

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*Beruit...Bombay...Haifa...Baghdad...London...Madrid...New York...*  
On the news — on the interent — running accounts of man-made catastrophe. Invariably there are nameless faces captured as background to the event — lives caught up in the whirlwind of history.



Rebecca Schull's adaptation of *Journey into the Whirlwind* premiered at Trinity College in Dublin.



●  
**REBECCA SCHULL:**  
**theatre including:**  
Broadway, Off Broadway,  
La Jolla Playhouse, Yale  
Repertory Theatre, The  
Kennedy Center, Lincoln  
Center, Dublin Focus

**Theatre, films including:**

*United 93, Flannel Pajamas, Analyze This, Analyze That, Odd Couple II, That Darn Cat, My Life, Crimes and Misdemeanors, upcoming films: The Little Children TV including: NBC series *Wings*, **awards:** Dramalogue Award, Hibernia Award for Best Actress (Dublin)*

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## P R E S S   R E L E A S E

“Exceptional!”

*The Los Angeles Times*

“Can this be entertaining? You bet!”

*Variety*

**REBECCA SCHULL**  
in  
**JOURNEY INTO THE WHIRLWIND**  
*timely as CNN / timeless as theatre*

*Baghdad...Haifa...Beruit...Darfur...London...New York ...* on the news — on the Internet — the running accounts of man-made catastrophe. Invariably there is video of nameless faces captured as background to the event — lives caught up in the whirlwind of history.

Rebecca Schull's adaptation of and performance in *Journey into the Whirlwind* gives voice to one such casualty. In 1937, journalist and professor of history Eugenia Ginzburg is at home with her husband and children when she is summoned to an interrogation by the secret police. She cannot imagine that this will be her journey into the whirlwind — one of the millions of victims of Stalin's purge of the Communist Party. A true believer in Party goals, she tries to resist the deliberate fabrication of her guilt, to no avail. She is sentenced and spends 20 years first in prison, then interned in the Gulag. But she is no mere statistic: she survives solitary confinement, brain washing, illness and starvation, ultimately recording her experience in *Journey Into the Whirlwind* and *Within the Whirlwind* written subsequent to her release in 1955.

Rebecca Schull's performance never solicits sympathy but secures it with a delicate but powerful portrayal that is quiet to the core. She is Eugenia Ginzburg at a time years after her release telling listeners what happened to her. The drama lies in the precision with which Ms. Schull recounts the ordeal — the ordinariness of consenting to the interrogation, the degree of hoarseness in a voice denied conversation, the tendency of prisons to grow cleaner and guards more polite the closer an inmate draws to death, the exact moment when memories can no longer be held at bay. She summons up her comrades: her fellow prisoners as well as a gallery of malignant bureaucrats, implacable judges “like fish in aspic,” and guards skeptical of the power of poetry. Scenes spill forth, treasures stored during the long, stifled years. Schull reveals a woman whose heroism is rooted in an ability to fix in her memory the everyday tedium and assaults of oppression and still to remain unalterably herself. It is the clarity of the self — her intellect, stamina, wit, spirit, and her ability to love and to hate — that kept her alive. *Journey into the Whirlwind* offers a dramatic paradigm for our time, making clear that historical and ongoing repression must be recognized and that compassion and understanding are basic to survival.

# Rebecca Schull

biography

**REBECCA SCHULL** is one of the country's leading character actresses. She was recently seen in *United 93* directed by Paul Greengrass and the film *Flannel Pajamas* which was featured at Sundance. She appears in the upcoming feature film *The Little Children* with Kate Winslet. Her other films include: *Analyze This* and *Analyze That* with Billy Crystal and Robert De Niro, *My Life* with Michael Keaton and Nicole Kidman, and *Odd Couple II* with Jack Lemmon and Walter Matthau. Familiar to television audiences as Fay in the hit NBC series, *Wings*, she has guest-starred in numerous series: *Law & Order*, *Law & Order Special Victims Unit*, *Frasier*, *Eisenhower* and *Lutz* and *Roseanne*. Her movies of the week credits include: *Holiday in Your Heart*, *Presumed Guilty*, *Mortal Fear* and *Stone Pillow*. Her extensive theatre credits include appearances on Broadway: *45 Seconds from Broadway* by Neil Simon, directed by Jerry Zaks; *Golda*, directed by Arthur Penn and *Herzl*, produced by Dory Scharly. Her Off Broadway credits include: *I Can't Remember Anything*, part of the Arthur Miller retrospective at Signature Theatre directed by Joe Chaikin, *Habitat*, *Little Eyolf*, *Naked*, *Nest of the Woodgrouse* directed by Joe Papp, *Fefu and Her Friends*, written and directed by Maria Irene Fornes and *Mary Stuart* directed by Des McAnuff. Her regional theatre credits include *Factory Girls* at the Williamstown Theatre Festival and Bay Street Theatre, *The Matchmaker* (Dramalog Award) and *Macbeth* both directed by Des McAnuff at LaJolla Playhouse, *The Greeks* directed by Mark Lamos at Hartford Stage, *The Seagull* at the Whole Theatre Co., *Richard II* at Yale Repertory Theatre and *Fugue* at the Long Wharf Theatre. She studied at Dublin's Stanislavski Studio and appeared at the Dublin Focus Theatre in *John Gabriel Borkman* and *A Delicate Balance* for which she received the Hibernia Award for Best Actress. She reprised her role in *I Can't Remember Anything* at the Dublin Theatre Festival Fringe. Ms. Schull adapted and premiered Eugenia Ginzburg's *Journey into the Whirlwind* at Trinity College in Dublin. *Journey into the Whirlwind* was subsequently produced at The CAST Theatre in Los Angeles and the American Jewish Theater in New York. There were additional performances at the Bruno Walter Auditorium at Lincoln Center and at the Irish Arts Center sponsored by Amnesty International. Ms. Schull was the founder and artistic director of New York's Open World Theatre Company which presented readings of works of playwrights from abroad that were denied production in their countries of origin due to censorship. She is a member of The Actors' Studio.

"An **exceptional** study in human vigilance and fortitude in the face of total absurdity. Schull makes us live Ginzberg's trauma by osmosis. She has the intelligence, the world weariness, the right amount of age. As a writer she has done an equally balanced job. It's a beautifully put-together script."  
The Los Angeles Times

Here is an evening of heart and dignity and **legitimate shock**. We meet and come to know the spirit of Eugenia Ginzberg, realized in the flesh of Rebecca Schull. The burden and the glory of the evening are hers. Ms. Schull never asks for our sympathy but secures it with her delicate portrayal of one woman's suffering.  
The Jewish Journal, L.A.

# JOURNEY INTO THE Whirlwind

"Schull does a **wonderful** job of delivering Ginzberg's richly written words. Ginzberg keeps her insights detached and her perspective so droll that it frequently borders on humor. Can this be entertaining? You bet?"  
Daily Variety


"It offers something rare in theatrical, literary and human terms: revelation. The human spirit at its most radiant illuminates the stage, profoundly **absorbing** and **affecting**. Ms Schull's performance is an object lesson in what a one-woman show should be."  
The Irish Times

"There is not a spare gesture, not a moment played too long. The chill of history and inhumanity is all here."  
The Manchester Guardian

"**Powerful** evidence of this most bloody time in the Soviet Union."  
Panorama, L.A.

The images she evokes of harrowing events are clear and controlled. For this **intelligent**, capable and committed veteran actress, the truth is drama enough."  
Drama-Logue, L.A.

"This is a performer of powerful presence, with a great depth of **authentic emotion**. The truth and intensity of Schull's feelings are at times so overwhelming that the enclosed space of the theatre seems too small to contain them. She can invest the smallest gesture with an emotional significance that cuts like a knife."  
San Diego Reader

  
"Rebecca Schull has taken the words and made them flesh. In her one-woman re-living of a life condensed by fear and misused power into an internal odyssey fueled by frustration, she becomes Eugenia Ginzburg. An **intensely moving** performance, quiet to the core, compelling and totally absorbing: deeply theatrical because it never tries to be."  
B'nai B'rith Messenger, L.A.

# Power *and* Performance

JONATHAN SAVILLE

**T**hose who saw the La Jolla Playhouse's wonderful production of *The Matchmaker* earlier this summer will not soon forget the characterization of the rich, melancholy Miss Van Huysen in the last act. One usually pays little attention to this role, which often appears as merely a convenient invention to carry the plot along; but actress Rebecca Schull gave it so much poignant comic life that it finally revealed itself as thematically and structurally vital in the economy of the whole play. Schull's languid, world-weary, self-pitying, self-dramatizing intonations in her repeated line, "It's the story of my life" had the quality not often found even in the best of performances in any role, of absolute definitiveness: afterward one would never be able to imagine the line rendered differently.

It was, therefore, with great interest I went to see Schull's one woman show, *Journey into the Whirlwind*, which is at the Los Angeles Cast Theatre.

The script of this play was developed by the actress herself from two volumes of memoirs by the Soviet labor camp inmate Eugenia Ginzburg. Ginzburg, a loyal communist, was an innocent victim of Stalin's purges in the mid-Thirties. Arrested in 1937, she spent the next two decades in labor camps, emerging into freedom only with the "thaw" in the Fifties. She was a strong, vivid writer, her lengthy narrative of the sufferings she underwent holds an important place in the by now large library of books about the horrors of political imprisonment under Soviet totalitarianism. (These numerous books, many of them by former prisoners, continue a genre already highly developed before the Russian Revolution, for the Nineteenth Century had its Tsarist jails and prison camps and its Dostoevskys and Chekhovs to describe them.)

From Ginzburg's memoirs, Schull has selected passages about the author's arrest, her interrogation by the secret police, her sham trial, her early experiences in jail and her transportation across Russia to a labor camp in a railroad car with other victims of Stalinist tyranny. The



production, directed by the expert Beth Schachter, is of the simplest: a table, a chair, an ashtray, a few props. All the drama is in the words, and as once would expect, Schull's performance gives these words searing intensity of the experiences they describe. Once again, "it's the story of my life"—but the life and the character are a world away from Wilde's sighing New York socialite, and Schull, like the fine actress she is, brings the impassioned, agonized, bitter, heroic Ginzburg even more fully before us than she did with Miss Van Huysen. This is a performer of powerful presence, with a great depth of authentic emotion; the truth and intensity of Schull's feelings, as she narrates (in the first person) the events of Ginzburg's "journey into the whirlwind," are at times overwhelming.

The narrative is accompanied with a certain economical amount of physical action — the putting on of a glove, the deliberate walking backward and forward a few paces as though in a confined cell, the lighting of a cigarette. These actions are effectively illustrative of place, time and event but more importantly, they are external signs of the inner emotional action that is at the center of Schull's acting. She can invest the smallest gesture with an emotional significance that cuts like a knife.

# Journey into the *Whirlwind*

BY RICHARD SCAFFIDI

Stalin's wholesale, brutal purges are here recalled and made personal by Rebecca Schull, a fine actress interpreting the autobiographical writings of Eugenia Ginzburg. From indignity and injustice to outright torture, the travails heaped up the former Soviet teacher and author are recounted with less conflict and bravery than expected but with more reflection. After all, to endure misery is mostly a matter of stamina whereas heroism means comprehending that misery and then moving forward. Therefore, *Journey Into the Whirlwind* aims minimally to spur emotions like sympathy. Rather is an education and political piece working to clarify history, heighten awareness of ongoing repressions and hopefully inspire greater world humanity.

This impossibly tall order is nearly filled by director Beth Schacter who clears the stage of excess trappings and stands back while Schull firmly but quietly commands the theatre for a smoothly flowing hour or so. Her character's strength and wisdom rest deep in the eyes. The images she evokes of harrowing events, pathetic comrades and cold blooded enemies are clear and controlled without the need to range or weep. For this intelligent, capable and committed veteran actress, the truth is drama enough.





# Journey Into The Whirlwind: Triumph of the Human Spirit

BY JOHN JONES

**REBECCA SCHULL IN THE PERSON OF RUSSIAN JOURNALIST EUGENIA GINZBURG, GIVES A PERFORMANCE OF HEART AND DIGNITY AND LEGITIMATE SHOCK.**

**T**he story of Eugenia Ginzburg, who was falsely accused of treason by her Soviet government, convicted in a two-day trial and incarcerated for 18 years in the Soviet gulag, is told by Rebecca Schull at the Cast Theatre. Ms. Schull entitles her piece *Journey into the Whirlwind* after the first volume of Ginzburg's memoirs. She is both adapter and solo performer. Here is an evening of heart and dignity and legitimate shock.

Working with a few props, i.e. a knapsack, a telephone, a large desk. Ms. Schull carries us into the

Ginzburg home in Stalin's Russia where she, a dedicated Communist member, is preparing breakfast. Arrest and imprisonment abruptly terminate any future family life. It is so sudden we hardly have time to understand. By simply walking 10 or 15 feet across the stage floor, Schull suggests the enormous separation placed between Ginzburg and her loved ones. The tale gathers momentum: from courtroom to prison, from prison to boxcar, from boxcar to Vladivostok to the Siberian farm prison system where she will spend 8 years of "internal exile." On the way we meet other female friends, many of whom will perish, fish-eyed guards implacable in their persecution and most importantly, we meet and come to know the spirit of Eugenia Ginzburg, realized in Schull master performance.

Dressed in black and white, occasionally removing a jacket or

scarf to suggest changes in local or the passage of years, she hovers before us, quiet, submissive, always surviving, not hateful but confident of her innocence and, early on, maintain a pathetic belief in the system that incarcerated her. The one hour performance is not of wrenching tears and agonizing hurt. Rather it is the unassuming story of inhuman events treated with orderly and clear precision. The drama is in the detail. Prisoners are allowed two letters a month to relatives; thousands die of starvation; a remembered rebuke to a her son haunts her; simple pleasures such as seeing sky or grass are cherished.

Director Beth A. Schacter blends sound and light to vitalize the story, while the burden and the glory of the evening are carried by Ms. Schull, who never asks for our sympathy, but secures it with her delicate but powerful portrayal.

BY JANICE ARKATOV

**D**uring her 1937-55 imprisonment, soviet journalist/historian Eugenia Ginzberg spent a dozen years in a Siberian slave labor camp, working as a nurse, a farmhand, a kindergarten teacher, a chicken tender, and a tree feller.

Inmates were excused from their jobs only when the temperature hit 50 below. Food rations were based on how many lengths of timber had been cut. Men died of disease, starvation and the cold. But Ginzberg survived—and lived to write about her experience.

That experience is brought to he stage in *Journey Into the Whirlwind*, a one-woman piece adapted and performed by Rebecca Schull. It opens Sunday at the Cast.

“Ginzberg was teaching at the University Kazan when she was arrested,” explained Schull. Her husband was a high-ranking Communist official, she had two sons and one stepdaughter — and was from all accounts, an exceptional woman in terms of intellect, energy, wit, spirit. And she was an absolutely committed Communist. They were really political animals who supported the Party and the importance of its goals.

But somewhere along the line, Ginzberg associated with the wrong person, and when the government began its purges in 1937, she was one of its first victims.

“They were show trials,” shrugged Schull, founder/artistic director of former New York-based Open World Theatre Company. “It was a pure fabrication on the part of Stalin, invented to urge the party of certain elements he imagined were opposed to him, looking to overthrow him. And yet, most of these people were supporters, even idolaters of Stalin. That’s what was so unbelievable.”

Ginzberg was convicted of “membership” in a terrorist group. Both her husband and parents were tainted by association and later arrested. Her children were sent to

a foster home for children of political prisoners, where the eldest died of starvation. Ginzberg herself served two years in solitary confinement before her internment in the labor camp, followed by many years of “internal exile” (In residence in the community but under the government’s watchful eye).

# Tragic Journey Through The Gulag



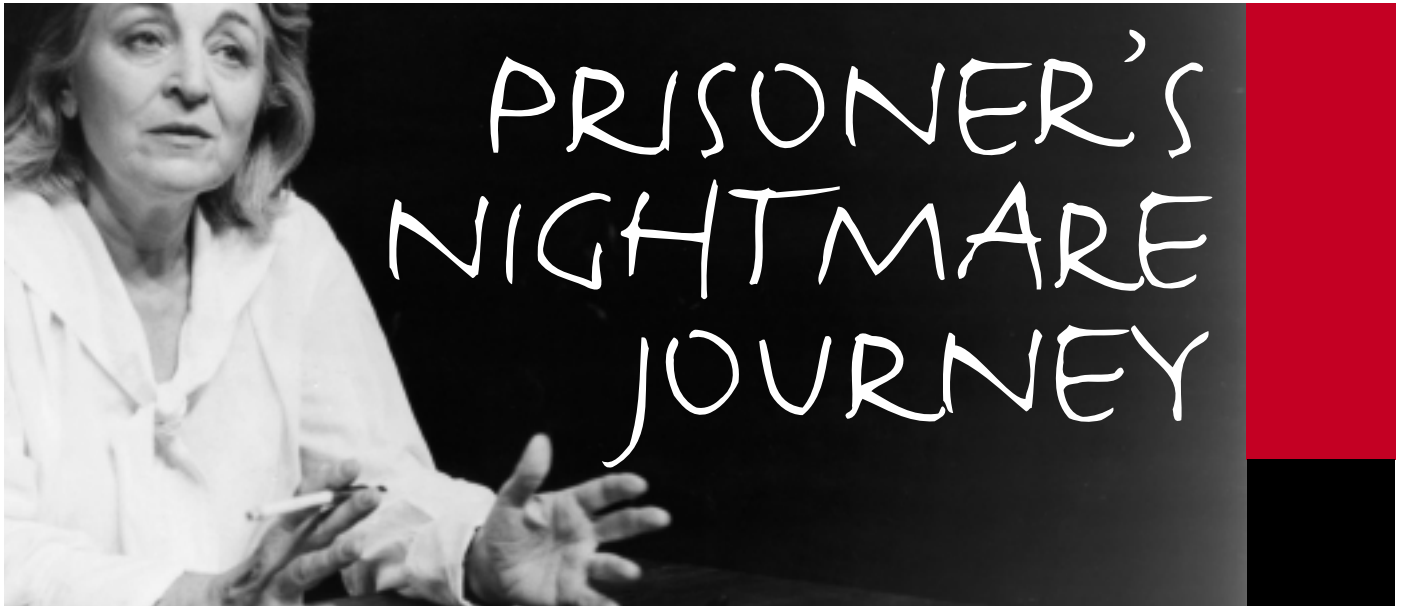
With the physical abuses came psychic ones. Ginzberg’s ongoing anxiety of not knowing what was happening to her children. They were allowed to write two letters a month to relatives. So she’d write poetry of her own, memorize it, erase it — and then write the letters.

After her release, Ginzberg wrote *Journey*, fully expecting to see it published. So she was quite circumspect talking about the things that happened, the motivation of the party leaders. But when it became clear that it would never be published, she wrote a second book — *Within the Whirlwind* — which takes off where the other left off. It is much more detailed, straightforward, pulls no punches in terms of the torture, the brutality, the killing; it is all there.”

“It reads like a novel,” Schull added. “That’s the genius of this woman. It’s written in first person, a documentary account. But it really has the sweep of a novel, the journey from one point to another. And, unlike historians, she writes scene after scene of encounters between people: a guard and a prisoner, people working together, a description of her own feelings and responses which are so detailed and rich.”

In spite of reverence for her work, Scull made changes. “I have changed her language. She’s a marvelous writer — but it’s writing done for the printed page. So there is probably not a single line that hasn’t been changed to make it sound like natural speech.”

The result, Schull hopes, will service a couple of purposes. “This was a remarkable woman — I want audiences to know her. And what happened didn’t just happen to her, but to million of others. It’s important, that people know these things exist.”



JERRY TALLMER

They don't need acting, they only need telling, the things that happened to Eugenia Ginzburg. Here are some of the things from her book, now brought to the stage of the Susan Block Theatre.

The telephone call came from the NKVD when she was in her kitchen in Kazan on the Olga, "one cold clear February morning in 1937." Would she please come in for questioning? "Don't worry," said her husband Paul, "if they arrested people like you, they'd have to lock up the whole party. You'll be back for lunch." She sent her son Alyosha off to school — and never saw him again. She never saw her mother again. It would be 18 years before she herself, Eugenia Ginzburg, writer and teacher, was back for lunch or for anything.

"I was lucky. My cell (at Prison No.1, Black Lake Prison was all the way down the corridor from the lavatories — so twice a day I had a good long walk." She wrote her name in tooth powder in the lavatory to make contact. There was also, of course, the historic tapping system. In this way she heard about another woman prisoner who cut her wrists after having been trapped into informing on 25 comrades. "How should a Communist behave when he's in prison in his own country?"

They put Eugenia under a spotlight, on her feet for seven days, demanding that she sign a confession. "It was my great good luck that torture was not yet a part of the interrogation"; only a few months later, it would be.

"Bring your things!" — those were the words to dread. It meant moving from prison to prison, cell to cell — from the hell you were used to, to hell unknown. Veteran prisoner Sagudin gave her his rule of thumb: the cleaner the cell, the closer to death.

At last she was put on trial for terrorism, complicity in the 1934 assassination of Kirov in Leningrad. "I've never been in Leningrad isn't that what you call an alibi?" she said to the three judges sitting there "like mummies, like fish in aspic." The trial lasted 7 minutes. The judges were out 2 minutes, came back with a 20 page document sentencing her to 10 years imprisonment in solitary confinement, loss of civil rights for 5 years, confiscation of all personal property.

"So what? A few books and my clothes. We didn't even have a radio."

Two years in a cell 5 feet by 3 feet — "I still remember every crack in the stone." Then "Bring your things!" and two months in Car No. 7 of a slow train bound for Vladivostok. They were let off at Sverdlovsk for delousing — "several; hundred women, all naked, I recognized my resemblance to my mother. I was more like her than myself..."

And so forth. And worse, much worse.

These are from the memories of Eugenia Ginzburg as recorded in her *Journey Into the Whirlwind*.

I said these things did not need acting, but of course that is not true. They need the kind of acting that doesn't seem to be acting, and they skillfully get just that, in a voice like warm toast, with a few cigarettes, a few sips of coffee, a beret off and on, even a touch of stumble on the tongue, from Rebecca Schull. The adaptation is hers, the direction is by Beth A. Schacter. Worth your journey, I should say.

# Notes from the Underground

by Laurie Stone

**E**ugenia Ginzberg was eating kasha and eggs and watching her son, Alyosha, depart for school, when she received a call from Stalin's secret police. She thought she'd be questioned in some pro forma fashion. She was jailed. It was 1937, weeks after S.M. Kirov, a high-ranking Communist Party official was assassinated in Leningrad. The crime panicked Stalin, but Ginzburg's arrest was crazy. She was a journalist and history professor. She and her husband, Paul, were dedicated Party members, tolerant even of abuses in the name of the workers' cause. Ginzburg was nowhere near Leningrad at the time of the crime, but the military tribunal that tried her wasn't concerned with reality. After her conviction for terrorism, Ginzburg served two years in solitary confinement followed by 18 years in Siberia, performing slave labor — felling trees, tending chickens, nursing her fellow comrades in temperatures that nose-dived to 50 degrees below zero.

In *Journey Into the Whirlwind*, named for the first volume of Ginzburg's memoirs — the play's source, along



with a franker sequel, *Within the Whirlwind*, Rebecca Schull has fashioned a stirring one-woman piece, performed by her with delicacy and conviction. On a nearly bare stage, seated at a desk, she unfurls Ginzburg's tale of imprisonment, estrangement from her family and former beliefs, and survival.

The nightmarish arrest shattering quotidian routine has Kafkaesque resonance but Schull taking Ginzburg's tack wisely refrains from mythologizing the experience. *Journey* neatly skirts sentimentality, and sweeping generalizations. The piece draws no moral lessons. It vivifies the millions tormented in gulags by sticking to a single testimony grounded in

novelistic detail: the number of paces that can be walked in a cell, the way coded messages are tapped out to fellow prisoners, the look of skin flaking from pellagra, the degree of hoarseness in a voice denied conversation for two years, the tendency of prisons to grow cleaner and guards more polite the closer an inmate draws to death.

Scenes spill forth, a treasure of language stored during the long stifling. After years of neglect, when she finally sees her naked image in a mirror, she confides, "I recognized myself only by my resemblance to my mother." After a walk in the exercise yard, she quips to her guard. "I enjoyed every moment,

I hope we can do it again soon.” Throughout her solitary confinement, Ginzberg was allowed to write only two letters a month. She’d compose poems on her ration of paper, memorize them, then erase the words so she could pen her letters.

She had extraordinary powers of recall. In one of the most moving passages, Ginzburg describes the unexpected memories that flood the isolated mind, “whole pages of books you’ve read.” During the three-month train ride, by cattle car, from Moscow to Siberia, she regaled other prisoners with poetry. A guard demanded to have the book she was reading from and to prove there was no book, Ginzburg conjured Eugene Onegin for half an hour straight. Memory, luck and a vigorous constitution saved her life, while thousands died in her arms.

Schull is immensely persuasive in portraying a woman whose heroism is rooted in her love of reality and whose will to live is anchored in her attachment to the sensual material world. Schull’s silver hair, her beautiful older and serene face is compelling in its straightforward seriousness. Her mouth can’t help forming rueful and ironic smiles. She moves from the desk, to a small bench, to a pile of fabric suggesting home, various prisons, the cattle car. her voice is rich without ever straining for effect, the voice of one who has been but cannot entirely explain. Sparingly emotional, she’s heartrending when, learning about the death of her son from starvation, she succumbs to maddening grief.

In 1955, Ginzburg was declared “rehabilitated” and permitted to live in Moscow under surveillance. “My

soul came through more or less intact. I could still love, still hate, still believe in people.”

**JOURNEY INTO THE WHIRLWIND.**  
Based on the memoirs of Eugenia Ginzburg, adapted by Rebecca Schull, directed Beth A. Schacter, presented at the Jewish American Theatre, 307 West 26th Street.