



Cabaret Theater on a mission:  
art, higher education,  
and community service  
brought together to do  
real work in the real world.

## HOW DID THIS HAPPEN? THE HISTORY OF PLUNGE

“...one little did...,” Jennifer's first original cabaret, debuted at a Women’s Work, Women’s Words theater series in Washington, DC in the Spring of 2001. It received a terrific response from the audiences at those first performances and a positive review from the Washington Post. The show was presented twice more in the Washington, DC area in as many years to full houses and equal enthusiasm.

In November 2002, Jennifer pursued two engagements that came to fruition, and with them a much-expanded opportunity: Allegheny College offered the show a spot on their Centerstage Series; and Women’s Services, Inc., a violence and domestic abuse shelter, asked if it would be possible to have the show as part of their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Both organizations are in Meadville, PA, where Jennifer grew up, and so she rallied her associates there to bring the two together. A residency took shape involving groups from the college, the shelter, and a few others in the community. In the end, the residency spanned four days with eight workshops in eight different venues, a half dozen vocal coachings and a performance! To create the workshops, Jennifer drew equally from her two professional lives – as singer/actress and organizational consultant and facilitator. She hoped that the show material would prove to be a creative catalyst and provide an innovative approach for working on substantive issues, but had never put her hopes to the test before this. Here are some of the things that happened in Meadville:

We did a session with the Allegheny Department of Dance and their Middle School Arts Program where 80 kids showed us what power looked like through dance and theater. As their perspectives widened, their concept of what constitutes “power” transcended the tangibles of money, guns and authority figures to settle into the intangibles of friendships, dreams, and self advocacy.

*And we thought, “Huh.”*

We ran a retreat for the staff and board of Women’s Services, Inc. that centered on how to help victims retain their ability to make choices from disadvantaged positions. We also worked with finding the positive impact of arts and media and their use as a tool in the services provided by the shelter. As we took the group through processes involving storytelling, creative writing, and music, the excitement level in the room grew palpable and the counselors crowded around to collect the materials we had brought.

*And we thought, “Wow.”*

continued...

# HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

## THE HISTORY OF PLUNGE

Page Two

We ran master classes for the Allegheny College Music Department and the local Senior High School music program. The kids were eager to sing for us, had tons of questions, and wanted to hear all the details of our particular path from high school and college to where we are today. The primary voice faculty at the college wrote, “You knocked a couple of my students off center, which was a really good thing – they immediately made faster progress.”  
*And we thought, “Yes!”*

We did a workshop for the Domestic Violence Support Group from Women’s Services, Inc. Like in the story on The Concept page, we started with a woman in a song and we talked about how to move forward and make decisions in the face of adversity. The women brought their own examples of literature and music that exemplified power and wove their own stories through our discussion. Together, we actually created a web of resources to expand their options when they found themselves backed into a corner or feeling helpless. In the end, a woman who could not even bring herself to talk throughout the afternoon, came up to us and whispered a tearful, “thank you.”  
*And we didn’t know how to express our thoughts.*

### **So, where does this lead us?**

To the organization of Plunge! A Cabaret Concept!

The possibilities of the program are endless, but here’s what we know:

- There is a place for art as more than entertainment. Art can sometimes reach around words and access our instincts and emotions. It allows our interactions to be more engaging, honest and complete.
- There is a growing movement in higher education to connect to community service. We believe this connection benefits everyone involved and we see a unique way to add to it.
- People use multiple intelligences. Using music and theater, we can tap into emotional, social and kinesthetic intelligences. This helps us to do real and meaningful work in sometimes difficult areas; and also brings people from all experiences and personalities together on equal footing so that they may fully contribute to the process.
- We have a particular set of skills that combine so uniquely in this program. We are experienced, professional performing artists with love and knowledge of music and theater that speaks to the modern era; we have significant leadership skills and backgrounds; and we are trained and certified facilitators focusing in the arenas of communication and leadership.

Plunge! A Cabaret Concept is what we’ve built to bring all these ideas together. We are tremendously excited about the program and the work we will do within it.