

College Essay
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I was sitting on the floor in near complete darkness, my head leaning back on the wall as I watched two of my friends shoot dialogue back and forth at each other. The loud rumble of the audience was only a few feet away in the crowded black box theater. I tried to take deep breaths to calm myself down, clasping my sweaty hands together to stop them from shaking. Moments before my cue, I was ready. My heart made a drum beat in my ears as I stepped into Oz.

I've been part of drama club for six years but this was new territory - the first time I had ever actually *acted* in a play. I did audition for the Jungle Book in seventh grade, but without being cast, I offered instead my help backstage. Ever since, I've straddled the line between actor and tech crew member. I found my home backstage in the 8th grade when I became stage manager for "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown". Most of my rehearsals were spent copying the actors' blocking or simply watching them practice their lines and musical numbers.

One of my good friends, Aja, played Charlie Brown and she had a musical number that required her to mimic trying to fly a kite and failing to do it. This number was a challenge because she really had to sell to the audience that she was just an earnest little kid who only wanted to fly his kite, just this once. I watched Aja stumble through lines she knew vaguely and walk stiffly across the stage until something just clicked. After weeks of practice, she transformed on stage and became Charlie Brown, the kid desperate to fly his kite. I watched my friends change who they were and become completely different people. They were confident, comfortable with themselves, and had such a stage presence. I wanted to be just like them.

In the 10th grade, my school put on "The Wizard of Oz" and I wanted to be *in* the show. First

I had to get through the auditions, particularly the dancing portions. I stood in the sloppy rows, waiting to see the dance before trying it out. The dance was simple enough, with basic leg and arm movements. “Okay, let’s run through it one more time before you audition,” my teacher called out. The music started and I was already a beat behind. I watched how nearly everyone else in the room seemed to be in tune with the music. I felt hopeless.

When my teachers divided us into groups for our auditions, I was already thinking about how great it would be to work backstage again. The other girls in my group were practicing a dance and I joined reluctantly. One of my friends, Tais, a regular at drama performances, pulled me over, “Nancy, you’re being too stiff. You have to make a choice with your character, but don’t copy what others are doing. Make your own choice.”

Tais’ words stayed in my back of my mind as I thought about applying them during the audition. When my group was called, I wasn’t the best dancer but I did my best to be as enthusiastic as possible, complete with exaggerated leg and arm movements. After a week of anxiety, the cast list went up and to my surprise, I actually got a speaking role in the ensemble.

Being a part of the drama club, and especially “The Wizard of Oz”, changed me for the better. I love acting and I feel the most like *myself* when I’m onstage, under the bright lights. I understand that I probably won’t pursue this professionally but I am now more comfortable in my own skin. It may be ironic, but stepping into the shoes of someone else and becoming another character has made me more comfortable with who I am. I don’t want to be like anyone else anymore; I am happy to be myself.