

I remember the first time I ever noticed how the world around me faded, and the magic of what I was seeing completely captured my attention and had me in awe. It came from watching the *Harry Potter* series. Yes, from a movie series that was supposed to be about fantasy and out of this world experiences, but it meant more than that to me. It was a way out. It gave me the freedom to believe in more than what was in front of me. It sparked my imagination and lit a fire within me.

After experiencing that, I went on a journey of self-discovery. There was a hunger, a craving for something artistic. Something that would bring me joy. I began to search online for acting auditions and made accounts on every website I could. I even used my mom's debit card without her knowing to pay for a subscription on one of these sites. My mom wasn't too happy about that, but I was more driven than I had ever been. I was motivated and no one could tell 5th grade me anything about what I wanted to do.

As I went through the remaining middle school years, I dealt with the constant internal conflict of not being able to be my authentic self. It was an "issue" for what seems like the entirety of my life. I stopped speaking as much and kept things short and sweet. I couldn't allow any "flavor" of who I was to be seen. I had to hide everything that was me. This lasted for years, until I reached my final years of high school.

My English teacher was an avid theater goer and loved to introduce us to plays. She had us read many plays and even took us on a trip to see a production of *Antigone* at The Wilma Theater. That was my introduction to Philly's thriving theater scene, and that production completely changed who I was. I was able to see Jennifer Kidwell as Antigone and was astonished by her commitment and presence. I went through a whirlwind of emotions that day during that production and will never forget it. I saw someone who looked like me on stage and it was empowering. It sparked that flame in me that had dimmed. When the last few months of high school came, I chose a school that I felt would benefit me most as an actor. I realized and told myself to take the lead to freedom and allow myself to do what I truly loved. I witnessed how acting is a beautiful journey. One of self-discovery and love of play.

In college I realized how much theater was helping me find my voice. I was able to tell the stories of characters who had some kind of relation to me. I found my niche. I had to give myself permission to be seen. To be confident enough to say what I normally wouldn't. Being an actor and working on the craft has been the best decision I have ever made.