

TRADITION

At the first rehearsal I had no idea what I was doing there. I looked around at the cast of 57 and realized at least half, probably more, were adults. How was I supposed to even closely relate to people so different in age from me? I didn't know anyone and couldn't help but think that someone had made a terrible mistake putting me in a show with all these people.

Now on the last night of the five week run of *Fiddler on the Roof*, I still have no idea why I was chosen to be in this amazing cast. Maybe someone did make a mistake, maybe I'm not supposed to be here at all. But looking around the crowded stage, I can't imagine not being a part of this.

The sound of the band blares in my ears as we open up the show. The stage spins as we all step in perfect rhythm and my heart feels as though it will leap out of my chest with complete bliss and a lot of sorrow. I look out at the audience – there is complete stillness and attention to every move, every note of “Tradition”. I look up as I do my dance step and spin again, and see the unstable catwalk in a mix of brightly colored lights and tangled thick cords. I look around and see the mix of earth tones which make up our costumes – the same costumes that have been the source of our complaints about the sweat and heat - along with the brilliant, blinding stage lights. I can smell the aroma of our sweat mixed with that indescribable scent of the theatre. I look down to make sure my feet are doing what they're supposed to do and see my black, scuffed shoes on the worn black stage.

I look around and watch 57 people try to fit gracefully on our tiny stage - the beauty of community theatre. I make eye contact with numerous fellow actors and almost start laughing aloud. I glance out again and see slight smiles form on the lips of the audience as we come to a close to the end of the number, and I can't help but beam myself. I see the red EXIT sign glowing as if symbolic of our last precious hours together. As we finish the song, wild applause erupts from the still audience and we all let out a huge breath of relief, for the audience is hooked. We all make it through the show without breaking down, well almost.

As we come on stage for the last sorrowful song, I promise myself I will not cry. I look around, and as if in slow motion, I see a single tear roll down the rough, chiseled cheek of my fellow actor, the one man in this cast I thought I'd never see cry. I can't help but start sobbing as soon I see that, and as I glance around the stage I notice that not a single person's eyes are dry.

That's when I know. I know that this is something truly miraculous and could never possibly be explained. I will never get to perform on this stage, with this cast, in this show again, and that's what breaks my heart. I have fallen in love with this group, every single one from age four to age sixty; they are my favorite people in the world. These people - these incredible, accepting, remarkable people - have become my family. My entire insides ache, twist, and drop at the thought of losing them, and already I miss the parties, fun, and the laughs.

As I look around crying and singing my gut wrenching, I hold my head high and perform with these tremendous people for the last time. And even though my heart is breaking with every passing second, I know that I am unbelievably lucky. I will remember

them forever. And as we finish our song, I hear the thunderous applause, whistles, and cheers, and I know that this moment right here, where we all have grown and become a great big family in this amazing place, is where I truly want to be. Looking back on the auditions and not knowing hardly anyone and wondering if this was even worth it, I know now that I couldn't have asked for anything better, and that I was so lucky and blessed to share this experience with these remarkable people. This is why actors are envied - because we get to connect and love different people of all ages, religions, and occupations. This is why we call it community theatre, connecting with the community and creating art. In one instant we are all connected as a cast, a community, a family in this theatre, this center, this home. The warm stage lights dry our tears and we party one last time.

“Without tradition our lives would be as shaky as....as a fiddler on the roof.”