

I think it's safe to say that one grows and changes in the course of four years, especially when you're in post-secondary. But what about when you spread four years of school over ten years? Do you grow more because it's been so long? Do you grow in different ways? I don't think I've even clocked all the ways that I have grown and lessons I have learned in ten years, but I know for sure that I am not the same as I was when I was 21.

In my first year I remember being equally nervous and equally putting on a false confidence. Everyone around me had experience in the arts somehow...and I was a farm kid that put on plays in her basement. I was intimidated, nervous and uncomfortable. Not uncomfortable in a bad way—just in a “I’m out of my element” way. Certificate year was a blur, and while I was massively uncomfortable, I was also enjoying what I was doing and hungry for more. I wanted to be in shows right away, and we did get to present a movement show which was one of the hardest experiences I’d had in my 21 years. Long story short, I was cast as an absentee and abusive mother, not much different than the one I grew up with, and being as young as I was, all of the trauma from homelife and the divorce was still pretty fresh. I remember saying to Deanne when she offered to recast me, “I’m playing the part, Deanne.” And when she asked why, I said, “Because this is not going to be another thing my mother takes away from me.” I was tired and angsty and stubborn. Determined to do this. Was that the right choice? I don’t know. It probably wasn’t the healthiest choice, but I know I would have been pissed at myself had I switched roles. First year taught me that therapy is important and sparked my massive love for journalling, which to me is kind of like therapy. It taught me that I don’t always have to be the loudest voice in the room or the best performer immediately. Well, that’s what it was starting to teach me but then I quit the program...

MP1 came six years later in 2022. Over those six years I’d had many different jobs, almost all of them revolving around the theatre even though I told myself I “wasn’t a theatre person” or maybe I was but I was a “behind the scenes person”. Those were incorrect. I started back slow, only taking five courses in the first term and I was NERVOUS. I was frustrated that I wasn’t excellent right away and was mortified at the thought of trial and error. MP1 was the first time I had heard Nathan’s analogy of the classroom being a lab, a place to experiment and try things out and figure out what works; not a place where we’re expected to be perfect or know everything. I thought it was a lovely analogy, but I still wanted to be great right away, even though I was dipping a toe back into the process and not even jumping in fully. I think there’s a time and a place for hesitancy; perhaps if a stranger invites you to come back to their sketchy van or invites you road trip home with him to Newfoundland—those are places for hesitancy. However, when starting back in your post-secondary training, I would encourage people to just jump in. While it did manage to work out for me, I do wish I would have just jumped in fully. Second year tackled some of my commitment issues and my fear of

mistakes. It made my perfectionism really stand out, but not necessarily in a good way. I learned that sometimes you have to disassemble yourself and your way of thinking to be put back together in a stronger way. That's what second year felt like—un-doing 27 years of what I thought I knew, tendencies, and beliefs, whether they be true or not.

MP2 was the year where the comedy vs drama debate became very personal to me. I was so tired of being told I was funny because it made me feel like the only thing I was good at was the being everyone's comic relief—on stage and off. It really frustrated me when I was told I should lean into the comedy because it made me feel like a one trick pony. I already was feeling like a joke in my life, the last thing I wanted to be was a joke on stage. It didn't matter how good I was at it (even though I was longing and dreaming of being good at this craft), it wasn't what was in my mind when I thought of "actor". I don't know if you know this about me, but I can be pretty stubborn. So the more people told me to do comedy, the more I pivoted in the opposite direction. All I was reading was hard, tragic plays. It's what I wanted to tackle in acting and vocal coaching. I wanted to prove to everyone, including myself that I was more than a laugh.

The comedy vs drama debate continued into my fourth year with everyone telling me to do a comedy. That seemed like the obvious choice, and not a very challenging one. While I did want to prove people wrong, I also wanted to do a story that mattered to me and would challenge me. I did it, and pretty successfully and was proud of myself. I then got cast in mostly comedic roles in M34 at Christmas and Hurry Hard...and I realized that I liked the feeling I got when I made people laugh. I liked being good at something and understanding the science that went into making a comedic moment work. I think I still want to do dramatic roles—it's a nice change of pace and a different kind of challenge, but I am slowly learning that making people laugh, no matter how small your role is, feels pretty good.

Third and fourth year made me feel like an angsty teenager that was fighting with my parents again. There was a huge amount of imposter syndrome in third year and feeling un-castable and like I was wasting this education because I was never going to make it on stage. However, out of that angst, came some really important lessons. The first being that your instructors do in fact know what they're talking about and they see everything. All of you knew that comedy was my thing—I was just really stubborn. I also learned that being really good at one thing doesn't mean you suck at all the other things. I learned that comparison is a tricky place to live in and won't actually do you much good. I learned that sometimes being a literal clown is where I feel the most free.

I remember that terrified 21 year old, 27 year old, 29 year old...afraid to make a mistake, afraid to admit she didn't know something, afraid to act like a fool. I felt a major shift towards the end of third year and the first term of fourth year. I was no longer going through the motions of being an actor or being in a show, I was actually living in the

moment. I saw myself be a consistent actor and scene partner through 40 and 50 show runs. I had the opportunity to be on stage and wasn't stressed out of my mind about it—it was actually fun?

Nathan and I were in advising one day, though this topic came up frequently, and I was spiraling. He offered that I may be living in this space of chaos because as shitty as it is, it may be what I was comfortable with. It was (and still can be) easier to spiral than it is to just buck up and deal with the issue at hand. This statement has stuck with me in a positive way—and I will often think of it when I'm getting in a spiraling mood. The last year especially, I have found myself knowing that I have a mountain to climb (Final Project, main stage shows, etc.) and knowing I could do it, I just had to put the work in and stick with it. Not get mad at myself or psyche myself out. It's been a really empowering two years.

My time at RSA has truly made me a stronger and wiser person. The practice of mentorship has been instrumental in my growth. I feel like I still have more to learn, and maybe (hopefully) always will, but I feel as though I've been given a strong toolbox that I can take out into the outside world and do this career. It's been a wild decade, but I'm ready.