

Whitney Sarah Louis

Crumbled House

Senior Project

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Artistic Aim

“Where are you from?” They often ask. All I can do is sigh in my head. I would not say that I, Whitney Sarah Louis has an identity problem, but what I would say is that my upbringing was not always a smooth road. That sense of feeling like you belong somewhere, I have lacked for many years. One thing I could never say is that I did not have a nice childhood, because I did. However, at the same time, I cannot stop feeling like I truly did not know anything about who I was or even the world itself. But I guess you could blame that on my youth. What makes me who I am today are the experiences that I have lived and overcame.

I have always been so proud to be Haitian. Whenever I’m asked, I do not hesitate and proudly say it. Often, I’ll get a few surprised looks on people’s faces, and I think to myself, “What exactly do they think a Haitian woman is supposed to look like? How ignorant is it from them to assume that all Haitians look alike!” The truth is, people from Haiti come in all shapes and forms, skin tones and colors, and that is what makes us so unique. Although Haiti is a beautiful country where crystal blue water surrounds its ground, where the sun shines on a proud nation, yet it is forgotten and mistreated. Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, their population suffers from debilitating and depressing misery. Since the long history of corrupted government, they struggled to feed and shelter its expanding population. Not only do they lack resources in food and habitation, their educational systems are failing due to the lack of educational resources as well. For all these reasons, and many more, my parents, born and raised in Haiti thought that raising their children outside of that country would be the best decision to make.

When a less fortunate foreigner hears about America, most of the time they think of this country as the end goal to trying to escape their misery. Many immigrants come to America with the idea of living the “American Dream.” Just like any dream, that dream is intangible. Therefore, what exactly is this dream that drives hundreds of thousands of people to want to immigrate to the United State? It is the promise of a better life for themselves and their family. A future full of chances and opportunities for their children.

My parents have four children, I am the third of my siblings. Everytime my mother was ready to give birth, a few weeks, days, or in the case of my sister’s birth, hours prior, she would travel to America from Haiti, and give birth. All of this so we would be born as Americans. To be an American comes with a lot of benefits and many open doors for you, and that is the reality of it all. Port of Prince Haiti, September 27th, 1990 at 5:30am, my mother’s water broke in the middle of the night. Prepared to travel to Florida at the end of the week, that night was unexpected. As both my parents kept calm, they made their way not to the hospital, but to the airport. Knowing that there might be major risks, the decision was extremely impulsive. The core of this decision was also the fact that my mother was not experiencing any contractions. Two hours, it takes two hours to travel from Haiti to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Those two hours felt like some of the longest hours my mom has ever had to spend. A second felt like a minute, a minute like an hour, an hour like five, and so on. At 6:40pm, my sister Marie Chantallya Louis, was born 6.8lbs as healthy as she could be.

This story will be one that will stay with our family forever, as the depiction of a 21 year old strong and determined soon to be mother, and her endurance towards a “better life” for her unborn child. That day was not where the story ended. It took 6 years for them to conceive again,

and like you guessed it, it was a must for my older brother to be born a US citizen. So there you have it, myself, just like my two brothers and my sister, are all technically Americans. However, developing that strong sense of Americanism and the patriotic values surrounding it, took me and the rest of my family a little longer.

Although I was born in the United States, I grew up in Canada. Knowing that there was this place where I felt like I belonged more hurt my heart and my mind. My heart belonged with my family, friends, my lovely suburban neighborhood, the community we built and the memories that I had created. However, my mind was constantly wondering about this other life that I could have had, if my parents had decided to stay in the United States and raise us there. What would I have been like? What would my hobbies be? I probably still would have been passionate about acting, but would I have had better opportunities to succeed without the language barrier, in a country where the film and entertainment industry is at a constant rise? These are questions that I cannot help but ask myself. I remember growing up, my family and I often traveled to New York, most of the time to visit family. My parents, especially my dad, would constantly try to push English onto us. I recall him buying me my first French to English dictionary when I was six-years-old. Often when we would travel to the United States, and I would struggle with the language, I would get upset at myself. I never questioned why my parents wanted us to speak English, not only because it is Canada's second language, but also because somehow, for some reason, I knew that one day, I would be living in my native country. Although I did not question them wanting us to speak English, I did question why they deprived us of this other life that, not even knowing what it would have been like, I could have had. As kids, we are exposed to television at an early age. Movies and TV series that I was always fascinated and drowned in were always American ones. The actors and actresses that I looked up to, and idealized, were

American. As an American girl, living in Canada, passionate about the art of movies, I was obsessed with "Hollywood " and the American culture, or at least what I thought it was, as shown on TV. I have come to realize that most of what I was seeing on television was not an accurate representation of what life in the United States truly is.

When the conversation about Canada and the fact that I grew up in a different country gets brought up, people often ask me whether I enjoyed living in Canada or in the United States more. To me, this question is never hard to answer. My life in Canada often feels like a fantasy. I hardly recall internal emotions that I felt. It feels like an out of body experience. Looking back to my childhood in Canada, I can barely talk about who that girl was. I remember being happy, I remember being close to my siblings, which I cannot say is the case anymore, I guess we can say we grew apart. However, what I do remember is that girl, she did not know who she was. Thinking about it now, of course at such a young age, you do not fully know who you truly are. To a certain extent, you never really do. However, the woman that I am today has grown exponentially, and I have learned so much about my roots. I am finally starting to get an idea of who I am and what I am meant to bring into this world. For this reason, " Do you like Canada or the United States better?" America feels like the wiser answer. As much as the United States has its many defaults, I am forever grateful to be a part of an Era that has brought, and is constantly bringing change to our country.

I decided to study acting at a very young age. Ever since I was a little girl, I have always loved to entertain people. Even though a career in the entertainment business does not necessarily require school, throughout High School, I knew I wanted to go to college. I spent a lot of time reflecting on what major would help me build the skills that I need to enter that world.

Theatre seemed like a good fit. First and foremost, acting has always been my passion and priority. A Theatre degree would not only help me sharpen my dramatic skills, but also help me to collaborate with others. Being in an environment surrounded by people that share the same passion as me is what I wanted. After I graduate, I hope to move to Los Angeles where I will pursue my career not only as an actor, but an entertainer. I want to focus more on on-camera acting and Film and Television. Also, being a TV Host is something that I have thought of doing.

In my four years of college, I could count in one hand all the projects I have been in. Most were student films or class projects. Who is to blame? I could blame it on the favoritism certain students have towards their friends, I could blame it on people wanting to play it safe and cast people they have worked with or know, mostly, I could also blame it on myself. However, there is no one to blame. I believe in the theory that everything happens for a reason, and these roles that I thought were perfect fits for me, were simply not. God had other plans for me. As an actor, patience is something that can never be lacked. With the constant growth of the industry, every actor should prepare themselves to hear a million no's before getting a yes. And that is something that I have always prepared myself for.

When asked to be a part of *Crumbled House*, I was excited to just be able to be a part of something. When hearing the writer's Josh Flink's vision, I was ecstatic to be part of such a sentimental and relatable project. With the main character moving away from her hometown, and having her life flipped upside down, I understood how that felt. When I moved, I felt like my friends, neighborhood, my prestigious school and life was getting erased, and I had to start over. For this project, I aim to keep pushing myself, try different approaches, and truly understand the character that I will be playing, while discovering new parts of myself. When I wrote my college

essay in 2016, I expressed that “when I first moved to the United States, I completely shut down. Moving felt like someone was taking away a part of my life, a part of me.” Due to the lack of confidence I had with the language, It was hard for me to go to school and feel like I could not be or express myself. Often, I knew what I wanted to say and somehow I knew how to say it, however, I would not feel comfortable enough to speak up. It was like my thoughts were trapped somewhere and it was not worth the risk of letting them out. The idea of feeling lost is a feeling that I want to explore when diving into my character. When big changes like these happen, it is hard to know who truly cares about you, which is one of the themes explored in *Crumbled House*.

Contextual Research:

Growing up, I have struggled with fully understanding my blackness. It was not until a few years ago that I began seeing what it meant to be a Black woman in America. There is a certain way that people look at you, and certain expectations that come along with that. Through the 19th amendment, women finally gained their right to vote. However, it has taken much longer for them, more specifically, Black women—to be granted a seat at the cultural and political table of America. Why is that? According to an article by the National Park Service, “Black men and white women usually led civil rights organizations and set the agenda. They often excluded Black women from their organizations and activities. For example, the National American Woman Suffrage Association prevented Black women from attending their conventions. Black women often had to march separately from white women in suffrage parades.” (*Between Two Worlds*) But again, why is that? Black women seem to constantly be at the bottom of the echelon.

As a 21 year old black woman, there are still many things that I need to learn regarding my blackness and its culture. When I was younger, there was not much representation of people of color on TV or on stage. It was rare that someone like me would have the lead role, or be the “pretty girl with the handsome love interest,” and when it did happen, they found ways to make the character stereotypical. It is too often that a black woman is denied a role because of the color of her skin. They go with the skinny blonde girl, because she seems more “appealing” for television, and the stage.

What I realized when being cast in *Crumbled House*, this being my last major project at Purchase and me possibly leaving the theatre behind, is that there is so much more that I need to learn about the world of theatre and the Black movement which helped lead the way to more

inclusiveness on the stage. Since *Crumbled House* is an original play that deals with some of the things I dealt with when I left Canada, I felt like my approach for this project should be to do research on Black women in the theatre world, and all the things they have accomplished. By doing so, it will allow me to learn more about my ancestors and where my pride comes from, which will help me towards my journey with self identity.

For any performer, before taking on any role, firstly, they must know who they are. Some people say that actors become actors solely on the idea of becoming someone else. In all honesty, growing up, that was one thing that drew me into acting. Being able to change characters everyday, made me feel as if I was “the main character” at all times. Since I had a hard time figuring out who I was and what my purpose was in this world, I felt like being myself was not enough. I needed dreams and fantasy, in order to be happy. People around me did not always believe my passion or could not see the endless possibilities it carried.

Over the past years, I have learned so much about theatre history, much more than I knew prior to entering college. However, I wish that I had been taught more about the side of theatre that highlights and focuses on African American women, like myself. Last semester, I was lucky enough to be taught an elective called “Performing Black Theater,” which was taught by Imani Douglas. Throughout the semester, we dove into the work of many strong and talented African American women and their contribution to theater. In this essay, I will be focusing on some of the work of three notable artists. Throughout this process, I hope to gain more knowledge on not only my craft, but my heritage.

In the past year, our lives have completely changed, COVID-19 has affected many of us, in many different ways. It has taken a toll on our daily lifestyle, and for many, it has added an extra

stress factor to the already stressful life we have. This semester more than ever, I've been at my highest stress point. Between having to manage two jobs, one remote and one as a server working night shifts, two majors and a minor, twenty-three credits, two senior projects, and having to deal with my personal life, to this day, at this exact moment, I do not know how I am doing it. I just keep pushing myself because at the end, I know that it will be all worth it. It is sad to say, but this past year has made me somewhat "fall out of love" with acting. Not necessarily acting itself, but it is the stress and lack of motivation for anything besides "getting things done" that has led me to this. It is also very hard to have something you love be altered. What was once a space where you could be yourself, as well as embodying different characters, all while being surrounded by people that share the same passion, is something that I miss immensely. Having to train remotely is not the same. The presence of passionate professors who dedicate their time to teach us some of the knowledge we need in the outside world, is not the same looking at a screen. It is almost as if we were all stuck in a stimulation, constantly in the presence of our laptops and screens, but where is the passion we all once felt?

Crumbled House is the biggest, most important project I have had the chance to be a part of. To me, the title of this play, means so much more than just a "saying." Most of my childhood felt like a "crumbled house." Not because I had somewhat of a dysfunctional family, but because of how much my life started changing after our move to the US. I will always remember that day; the day my dad decided to flip our lives upside down. When I first read *Crumbled House* by Josh Flink, I felt as if I was living a flashback of my life. I was a 13 year old girl, entering secondary school, outgoing and funny. To me, I was finally making my way into being a "real teenager." All I knew about being a teenager is what I saw on television, a fantasy that was built upon American coming of age shows. But at the same time, moving into a different country was the

last thing I wanted to hear. Similar to the play, the idea of telling my friends that I was leaving to a different country felt like a chore. It took me weeks to accept the fact that this was happening. For the longest, I was in denial. I knew it was happening, but I was not ready to accept the fact that my whole life was going to change. Everything I knew, everything I had become accustomed to was going to become just a memory. When my parents told me that we were going to move into a different country, I was not completely upset, well at least in the beginning. I knew that if I wanted to make it into the big screen, if I truly wanted to make an impact in the entertainment industry, I would have to eventually move into the United States. Living in America was always something that I knew was eventually going to happen, because of the dreams I had. However, it was not until weeks later that I felt ready to tell my friends. As a young teenager, of course it was hard to leave my friends, but I do believe that the hardest part for me was to start over. Starting over from being a “popular girl” with many friends, to entering a new school where I could barely express my thoughts, or even be myself, was one of the hardest things I have had to overcome. This is to say, that over the years, I have lost a sense of identity within myself. The women that I will be researching have done so much for our community, and have allowed many voices to be heard, and this why I truly feel as if I can look up to them in my journey to self discovery.

Lorraine Hansberry, Adrienne Kennedy and Ntozake Shange are all talented women of color artists. Lorraine Hansberry was the first African-American female author to have a play performed on Broadway. She’s best known for her hit play *A Raisin in the Sun* which was eventually adapted into a motion film. Adrienne Kennedy, who is also an amazing playwright wrote *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, which is a play that deals with racial identity. The play won the Obie Award for Distinguished Play. Ntozake Shange is someone else that I had not heard about,

For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide, is a play written by her. The play consists of an all Black female cast, as it addresses issues relating to oppression, racism and sexism in our society.

Who exactly was Lorraine Hansberry? Not only was she the first Black playwright and the youngest African American to win a New York Critics' Circle award, but throughout her life, she fought for Civil Rights and equality for African American. Lorraine was the granddaughter of a freed enslaved person. Her grandfather was her inspiration to many of her pieces. Born on May 19th, 1930 in Chicago Illinois, Hansberry's childhood was not easy. The author of her biography published by *A&E Television Networks* explains that "her parents contributed large sums of money to the NAACP and the Urban League. In 1938, Hansberry's family moved to a white neighborhood and was violently attacked by neighbors. They refused to move until a court ordered them to do so, and the case made it to the Supreme Court as *Hansberry v. Lee*, ruling restrictive covenants illegal." (*Lorraine*) After dropping out of college after two years, she started working for a man named Paul Robinson, as a writer in a Black newspaper called *Freedom*. It was not until 1956, that Lorraine stopped working and became a full-time author. When researching Hansberry's life, one thing that caught my eye is her decision to write her name under the pseudo "L. H." Her choice to do that was based on fear of discrimination and sexism towards her writing. As women, we deal with sexism everyday, even if it is in micro. When it comes to sharing your opinions and thoughts on a subject, or simply your art having it be seen as lesser because of the simple fact of being a woman is something that many female authors deal with.

When first writing her award winning play, *A Raisin in the Sun* was named *The Crystal Stair*.

The play revolves around an African American lower class family living in Chicago who struggles in order to gain acceptance and recognition from middle class White people. It opened at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on March 11, 1959, and quickly became a huge success. When I first read the play, I was immediately drawn to the character of Beneatha Younger. She is a college student planning to go to medical school. Beneatha is also the only family member able to have the opportunity to go to college. She is sometimes a little overbearing in the pride she takes in being an "intellectual."

Last semester, I was lucky enough to be able to take on Beneatha's character, for a class project. The way she carries herself and challenges every single member of her family is something that I could relate to. When I was told to perform a scene from the play, I researched her character and tried understanding why she is the way she is. Beneatha is an ambitious young woman who constantly seeks more for herself. She has an understanding that the color of her skin puts limitations on the opportunities she should acquire in life. However, she does not let that stop her from wanting to achieve everything she wants in life. *A Raisin in the Sun* was adapted into a movie in 1961. The movie starred Sidney Poitier and Diana Sands who plays Beneatha. In 2008, a new adaptation of the film came out. This time, Beneatha's character was portrayed by actress Sanann Lathan, who I absolutely love. Both women gave light to the character in their own way. Breaking down her character has inspired me in many ways. I believe that, since I saw so much of myself in Beneatha's character, I was able to, in a way, "become her," and that's the approach I aim to take with every new character that I play, including Lisa's role in *Crumbled House*.

An Article from *Poet.org* states, "Sometimes referred to as 'the artistic sister of the Black Power Movement,' the Black Arts Movement stands as the single most controversial moment in the history of African-American literature—possibly in American literature as a whole. Although it fundamentally changed American attitudes both toward the function and meaning of literature as well as the place of ethnic literature in English departments, African-American scholars as prominent as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., have deemed it the 'shortest and least successful' movement in African American cultural history." —"Black Creativity: On the Cutting Edge," *Time* (Oct. 10, 1994.) These three women just mentioned were all part of that movement which helped give young African Americans hope and a voice in the world of theatre and the arts.

Adrienne Kennedy was born in Pittsburg in 1931, she attended Ohio State University with a B.A in Education in 1953. Later, Kennedy continued pursuing her education by attending Columbia University, the American Theatre Wing, the New School of Social Research, and Circle in the Square Theatre School. Kennedy also participated in Edward Albee's Theatre Workshop, in New York City. *FunnyHouse of a Negro* which premiered in 1961 was her debut into avant-garde theatre. The play uses poetic alienation in order to portray a surrealist performance of a Black woman caught between African and European heritages. It's a battle with her inner self. Interestingly, in her mind, she views the standards of White society as good, and Black standards as evil and unworthy. Sarah, who is the protagonist of the play, did not conform with the Black Arts Movement, for this reason, many questioned whether or not Adrenne Kennedy should have her place in the movement. In his book *Understanding Adrienne Kennedy*, Philip C. Kolin quoted a notable critic named Clive Barnes who said, "Of all our black writers, Kennedy is most concerned with white, with white relationships, with white blood. She thinks black, but she remembers white. It gives her work an eddying ambiguity" (*Kollin*) In my

opinion, it is sometimes difficult for biracial men and women to fully understand the struggle of African American, especially if they are of a lighter tone. Lighter skin people with features that are similar to white people's and hair that are not as coarse as the "Black people's hair" have certain privileges over darker skin people in this world. Typically, a biracial woman with a White mom is more likely to have a different experience growing up, than a biracial woman with a Black mom. Margaret O'Donoghue states in her article "Through their parenting of biracial children, the mothers had come to a greater sense of their own racial identity and to recognize White privilege and their own White identity. Their specific ethnic identity, as ethnic Whites, has not been passed on to their children." (*O'Donoghue*) This supports the idea that a White mother is more likely to have difficulty raising a Black daughter, if she does not educate herself the right way.

The play takes place in Sarah's bedroom, this setting illustrates the inside of her mind. The reason why Sarah feels so conflicted with herself is because she was born into a world where being Black is seen as a terrible thing, whereas everything White is good. In the play, she describes her father as a "wild black beast" that has haunted her since her conception (*Kennedy 562*). "I am tied to the black Negro" she says, "He came when I was a child...haunted my conception, diseased my birth" (*Kennedy 562*). Society made it such a wrongful thing to be Black, that Sarah is repulsed by every part of her blackness. For many, *FunnyHouse of a Negro* was very controversial. However, I did try to understand the message Adrienne Kennedy was trying to convey. The play demonstrates how a person can be emotionally and mentally damaged by society and the certain set of rules and standards that it has created.

Ntozake Shange is another extremely talented artist and writer. As a Black feminist, she dedicated her life to bring light on issues relating to gender, racism and Black power. She was born on October 18th, 1948 in Trenton, New Jersey from an upper middle-class African American family. She Died only three years ago, on October 27th, 2018. She was lucky to have had a good childhood, however, upon entering college in Southern California, she began dealing with depression. According to her biography, “ Shange’s college years were difficult, however; frustrated and hurt after separating from her first husband, she attempted suicide several times before focusing her rage against the limitations society imposes on Black women.” (*Ntozake Shange*) Her journey towards self love is one that many have a difficult time finding. For Shange, being able to transform all that pain and rage into something worth fighting for, shows that passion, good or bad, can take you in a fortuitous path. She inspires me to keep fighting for my craft, and what I love. She challenges me to think outside of the box, and make decisions that will take me out of my comfort zone.

“Where there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits.” - Ntozake Shange

This quote was very striking, to me. Again, humanity needs to acknowledge the beauty that women bring to this world, as well as power and strength that is yet so intangible to us.

For Colored Girls Who have Considered Suicided When the Rainbow is Enuf is the piece in which she is most well known for. The piece was written as a choreopoem, Shange uses a

combination of rhyming lyrics and a play-like format to captivate the readers. The poems deal with love, abandonment, domestic violence, colorism and so much more. The rainbow is a powerful symbol in Shange's choreopoem. Not only is it beautiful, but the meaning of it is more complex than one might think. There is more to the rainbow than its seven colors, just like there is more to these women than what people see or assume. The piece addresses many conflicts regarding Black women. From the beginning of time, Black women have been sexually oppressed and often they are seen as "sex objects." *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide* was meant to spark a conversation, a conversation that needs to be heard, from strong voices who have something to say. When I first came across *For Colored Girls*, I had not read the complete piece, only one monologue. I was not aware of how complex the full piece actually was. Each story has its own raw message that it carries. At first read, the poems were not very hard to understand, nonetheless I chose to read them more than once. Each time, I discovered new things about every character. The women in Shange's poems move from different states of mind, from self-induced anxiety to depression and to levels of madness granted by social constructions. These poems were written for women of color to feel a sense of sisterhood. In an interview by Rebecca Carroll, Shange stated "I write for young girls of color, for girls who don't even exist yet, so that there is something there for them when they arrive. I can only change how they live, not how they think." Her purpose in life was to not only create art, but create art which will remain impactful for many generations to come.

These three women have helped restore my drive for acting. Reading all the things that they have done, they have inspired me to keep fighting for my voice to be heard in this world.

Technical Essay

As for myself, a 21 year old African American, graduating college and trying to navigate my way in this world has not been the easiest. These past few months have been some of the hardest, most stressful months of my life. Nonetheless, everything going on in my life, including all the work I have to do, in order to make sure that I hear my name get called on May 21st makes it all worth it at the end. When I look back on this semester, and my Senior Project, I am immensely proud of myself. This semester, I am taking 24 credits, acting in two Senior Projects, double majoring in Theater and Performance, as well as Communications, and minoring in film. All while having two jobs. Balancing my life has been a constant struggle, which is why the past few months have been so hard. There are many times that I just felt like giving up, but I would constantly remind myself that everything I do has a purpose into what I'm destined for. All the obstacles and challenges that life has been putting me through, is helping me grow. I realize now, it is the experiences that I live and how I deal with them, that shapes who I am and who I'll become. In the beginning of this process I questioned my identity, school, acting, and the purpose of it all. *Crumbled House* has helped restore faith in myself, my craft, and gave me a purpose. It allowed me to get out of my head, and be a part of an ensemble.

Of course rehearsals, memorizing lines, and breaking down my character was not easy. However, the process not only helped me learn new things about my character, but I also learned a lot about myself as an actor. Certain choices that I had decided to make for Lisa's character, made me feel as if I was living forgotten moments of my childhood and who I used to be through Lisa. Many of these moments that happened in my childhood, have led me to become the woman I am today.

“There is a certain part of all of us that lives outside of time. Perhaps we become aware of our age only at exceptional moments and most of the time we are ageless.” – Milan Kundera

Yes, I am only 21 years-old, but the idea of growing up and having all these new responsibilities, and uncertainties of life have caused my mental health to deteriorate. Having to perform as a twelve-year-old little girl, helped me regain my youthful soul. Not to say that it erased all my responsibilities, but it shed light to a side of me that I thought was buried. That is exactly what I was aiming for. To dive into this youthful side of me, in order for Lisa’s character to be conveyed the way Josh Flink, the writer pictured it to be.

The way I went about it is by letting most of my guards down, which allowed a more vulnerable side of me to show. In order for me to feel comfortable in the skin of this twelve-year-old character, who seemed so different from who I am today, I really had to put my feet back in the shoes of twelve-year-old Sarah, full of life.. Researching these three women mentioned earlier, gave me hope for the future and helped restore my passion for what I do, diving into my youthful past, allowed me to connect with my character better. Overall, this process has been such a challenge for me. For so long, I have felt somewhat disconnected from reality, however all the work I have put in my creative process, and all the things that I have uncovered in the script, and the research added to the many bits of my character’s uniqueness.

One thing that I absolutely did not want to do was stop having fun. Often, actors become so focused and impatient with the process, that they lose all the joy and passion for it. I intended for the opposite to happen. As intended, it worked in my favor, I gained even more love and interest for it. Being creative happens when losing something or feeling lost, while suddenly finding your

way through the process. I believed that is what helped me discover the character as well as myself.

Memorizing lines is something that has always come as second nature to me. This time was a bit different. I wanted to approach it with the eyes of a child. The memorization needed to come to me naturally. The more I rehearsed with a childlike mindset, and dove deeper into my character, the more comfortable I would be, and that is not until then that the lines would come as second nature to me. I realized that if I knew my character's motives and intentions, I would be able to easily break down each scene and find Lisa's true voice. In the process, I was also able to discover new things about each character. Things that I liked, and other things that I found would bother me, as an actual kid, which made the fictional friendship between each kid feel more real.

I am beyond grateful for all the things I have taken from this experience. At some point during the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt like I had somewhat lost myself. In a way, all of our lives were put on pause, and nobody really knew when things would start back again. This put me in a state of dullness, as I could not find purpose in anything. When Senior year started, I had no idea what I was going to do as my final Senior Project. I felt like our lives were on pause for so long that when real responsibilities began showing up, I did not know how to show up myself. It scared me, the thought of possibly not being able to graduate in May of 2021 was something I was terrified of. It then hit me, I needed to take not only this final year into my own hands but my life as well. That is when I started to reach out to my advisors, and fellow classmates. In doing so, I was fortunate enough to be cast into two projects.

The first project that I was cast in was *La Diabliesse* written by the talented Cherayna Rulow. The part I auditioned for was a non-speaking role. I thought the play was so powerful, and had a lot of depth and history to it, that just being a part of it meant a lot to me. Later, I was reached out regarding a second Senior Project, which I immediately was drawn to, after reading the first draft. *Crumbled House* felt so close to home, since I lived a similar experience as Allie, the main character. That is when I knew I wanted *Crumbled House* to be my official Senior Project. Nonetheless, I had decided to not drop out of *La Diabliesse*, since I did not want to break my commitment, and I also knew that this semester I wanted to challenge myself. Little did I know, many more challenging things would come along.

Even though my Senior year did not go as I imagined it to be, because of the pandemic, being a part of *Crumbled House* was able to fulfill my wish of being a part of an ensemble. At times, throughout this process, I thought about what this year would have been like if COVID-19 never started, and where I would be today, physically and mentally. Maybe I would not have been so stressed and overwhelmed, maybe I would have been happier and more excited about life, but also, maybe not. There are so many questions that are left unanswered. No one truly knows where the world would be if the Pandemic never started. Then I think to myself, that everything happens for a reason. It was God's plan to put me through all those hurdles for me to overcome and grow from. There is no point of wondering "what if?" because it is the what if's that hold you back and will stop anyone from moving forward in life. Therefore, I am no longer thinking "what if?" Instead, I think to myself, what's next? Even though it was a tough year, I am grateful for everything this year has brought me. From being able to discover more about myself as an actor, to graduating in a few weeks.

After I graduate, I hope to move to Los Angeles where I will pursue my career not only as an actor, but as an entertainer. My goal is to join the entertainment industry, where I truly feel it is where I belong. With my Film Minor plan to write and direct my own films, as well as acting in some. *Crumbled House* was officially my last project as a college student, but certainly not my last as a working actor. Purchase College has taught me many things, things that I will forever carry with me. Even though there were a lot of ups and downs, I know that the ups will always outweigh the downs. Because at the end of the day, the past four years have shown me who I truly am, and what I am meant to accomplish in this world, and for that I will forever be grateful for my experience.

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