

My name is Josie Parish, and I have been pursuing a career in technical theatre since 2016. Ever since I was young, I have always known I have wanted to pursue art. To me, working in theatre is a way to bring the things I create to life.

I grew up as the middle of 6 children, (4 sisters and a step brother) living with my grandparents in the country in Illinois. We survived off of only my grandfather's salary which he made as an ER nurse, and from the support of the local church programs that helped us stay fed and clothed.

When I was around 13-14 years old, My grandfather was diagnosed with skin cancer and had to have a nurse visit us at home to repack the wound on his head from the surgery he had to remove it. CPS was called when the nurse learned that we were living and raised in a hoarder household, with trash and belongings piled up in places over our heads, with no working oven, heat, or running water. My mother lied and quickly moved us into an apartment, which quickly went right back to being a hoarder house.

A couple years later when I was 15 years old, My grandfather had his first heart attack. I rode with him to the ER, and as he was a stubborn old man who had retired a few years prior, he refused to let me drive, and I waited at the ER for other family members to show up as he was put into a room. From there, I alone moved back in with my grandmother to take care of her. My grandmother's health was declining as well, and I had to use my paychecks from the youth camp I worked at over the summer (paychecks of \$75 - \$100 a week) to take care of her and make sure we could afford groceries that we could make in the microwave or fit into the minifridge as the main fridge died ages ago. I also drove her to make all of the funeral arrangements as my grandfather passed a week later from a second heart attack. Six months later, my grandmother passed as well. Shortly after this, I moved in with my Dad and shared a room with my step brother and youngest sister to get away from my mother.

Moving in with my dad, I felt like I had placed an unexpected financial burden on him as he and my step mother now had to pay for all of my schooling and anything I needed. I tried my hardest to only ask for the things I needed, and only spent money when necessary. When it came time to consider colleges, I chose the one that gave me the greatest amount of financial aid, to make sure I could pay for it myself with the help of federal loans and scholarships.

From a young age, however, I always knew I wanted to pursue a career in the arts. When I originally started my undergrad degree at EIU, it was as a graphic design major. However, by my second semester I realized I wanted to do more with my skills. I quickly switched majors to technical theatre, especially once I realized the things I made were being worn, or shown off to a whole group of people, without the spotlight having to be solely on me. I have worked in almost every area of technical theatre starting as an assistant stage manager on *Selkie: Between Land and Sea*, for which I also sewed my first costume ever: A gorgeous red dress that used multiple types of fabric. I had no part in the design of that dress, but it was the first thing I truly ever stitched.

From there I worked in the costume shop until I was switched over to the scene shop through my federal work study program. From there, my confidence and skills rose exponentially. I worked as a carpenter who also was in charge of the prop closet, and eventually did a class where I was Co-artistic Director and Stage Manager for *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. During this time, I was also working in the theatre office as a desk worker when I wasn't in the scene shop or rehearsals.

And then 2020 happened. I caught a “mysterious” illness of which I was told the flu test must have been a false negative, however we now believe I caught covid. I missed the last first half of my last semester because I wasn’t recovering, but the doctors didn’t have the tests to tell me what was wrong. I then also missed the second half of my last semester due to lockdown. I was supposed to, after graduating, be the scenic designer and technical director for a production of *Spamalot!*, but that was shut down after a couple weeks of pre-production. I wasn’t able to find a job from May until the end of 2020 in which I found a job in retail to survive. I wasn’t able to find a job in theatre until May of 2021, and it didn’t pay enough, but I took the gig anyway. I then after that contract worked as an adjunct professor of stagecraft at Blackburn college for their fall semester, while also working a retail job.

From there, I worked at Timberlake Playhouse as a ‘general technician’ aka I was working in every department, oftentimes alone. By the end of my time there, I was working 14 hour days as I was in multiple departments for their Christmas production of *Forever Plaid: Plaid Tidings*. I was the scenic designer, props master and artisan (this show has over 150 props), deck crew, technical director and more. This show almost broke me, and my love of theatre entirely.

For my next job, I shrunk the amount of jobs I was responsible for down to 2-3. I was the Technical Director and costume shop manager, as well as props for certain shows. This was the first and I hope only job that I had to leave before my contract was finished. I was not going to let myself become the way I was after TLP. I love theatre, but I had to learn when to put myself first. My final show here was *The Great American Trailer Park Musical* in which we had three trailers onstage, and the only other carpenter I had was the sound/lighting designer who had to run sound for shows, So I only had him for a few hours each day. I was also the Props Master for this show on top of this. It took a lot of strength for me to walk away.

While I am grateful for all of the opportunities I have had, I also know that my education never felt truly finished due to covid. I know that getting my masters in Scenic Design from WIU will help me continue to work in theatre. It’s been a rough ride getting to this point, and I have definitely considered leaving theatre entirely, but I keep coming back because I know that is what I want to do with my life, I just need the help to achieve it. I know the scholarship asked for a written or video sample of my work, but I hope you will accept my portfolio instead.