

How Participating in Community Theater Changed My Life

By [Eliza Lynn Taylor](#), published Feb 23, 2007

I remember being painfully shy as a child. One on one with adults I wasn't so bad, but in a crowd I was in real trouble. I did not like to meet new people. My sister was outgoing and it seemed nothing embarrassed her. Everything embarrassed me; just having someone realize I was in the room was enough to set off my glowing red face. As most children do, I did grow out of it to a certain extent, but I still embarrassed easily and I didn't like new situations. I had a small handful of friends and that was enough for me. I seemed to get along great with the elderly, perhaps because I liked listening to them tell their stories. Of course I could have fun with my friends and it didn't seem on the outside as if I was shy, but I was.

When I was twelve my mother saw an article in the local newspaper that the community college had an open casting call for the community theater it sponsored. She thought it would be a good idea for me to try out so that maybe it would help with my shyness. I didn't know what to expect, but as I didn't particularly like being shy, I went along with it. They wanted me to sing- alone! I wanted to slink out of the auditorium the way I'd come in. Everyone seemed to have sheet music with them and I hadn't even thought that I might need a song much less figure out where I was going to get sheet music. I swallowed hard and jumped on the first thing that came to mind. They acted like they had never heard of "Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore" and I had to sing acappella. My knees knocked so hard I had to sit on the edge of the stage to keep from falling over. However the reading went very well. I don't know why they let me in but they cast me in two parts in the production of "Bye-Bye Birdie". I played a nondescript teeny-bopper and a reporter. We had to learn dance routines (I had never had dance lessons) and stage blocking, to memorize our lines and of course the music! I didn't have to sing anything by my self so it went well. I loved it.

Before long I was trying out for another one and another one. I even took sheet [music](#) when I could find it, but I didn't sweat when I had to sing unaccompanied by the piano, and I learned a lot about dancing. I ended up in four plays, if memory serves: "Bye-Bye Birdie", a [dinner](#) theater production called "The Drunkard" where I had to where a skimpy outfit as a bar maid, and I was in "Oklahoma!" and "The Music Man". I also sang in several talent shows and chorus class concerts, modeled for 4-H, and sang in a country/western band my [parents](#) had started. I even did a stint as radio station disc jockey and advertisement sales person. My mother had no idea what she was starting when she had me try out for that first play.

I did eventually give up the acting bug as for some reason I never did quite get over the knee-knocking stage fright, but I am no longer afraid to talk to people (some would say I talk too much) and I enjoy being around people even if I've never met them before. I don't think I would have had the nerve to be a writer if I hadn't gotten over being shy and I wouldn't have gotten over that if I hadn't been involved in community theater.