

FIRST-CLASS COACHING

MY MENTOR -

THE SHERRI + ASHLEY STORY EST. 2007 - PRESENT

In 2007, I was in a production of *Chicago* at CenterStage. I was *just* a junior in high school in an “adult production” really feeling myself in the ensemble in such an iconic show. During rehearsals my Mom, who was sitting in the holding space, began talking to the lady playing Roxie Hart, Ms. Sherri herself. My mom explained to Sherri that her daughter was a rising senior and her upcoming college auditions for Musical Theatre programs were beyond overwhelming (at that point I had a binder of FIFTEEN schools I was planning on auditioning for). Sherri explained that she had gone to school for theatre - attending Evansville University for her undergraduate and Oklahoma for her Master’s in Fine Arts. As she had gone through the process twice she told my mother she’d be happy to help coach me for the upcoming auditions that would decide my fate for the next 4 years.



Chicago, CenterStage, 2007 (Sherri in the white & Me in the ensemble)

After rehearsal was over my Mom was thrilled with her new coaching find. I, on the other hand, was completely mortified. How could my Mother talk to the LEAD of MY show when I had never said one word to her? As a shy kid I didn't go out of my way to meet new people at the time and stuck to my circle of friends within the theatre community. Furthermore, she set me up to have a private coaching session with a complete stranger for an audition almost six months away. In hindsight, I should have been eternally grateful to my Mother for hunting down a coach and paying premium dollar for one-on-one coaching to help achieve my dreams, but I was young and naive. I was just mad I didn't have a say in it at the time! Honestly, having to see Sherri for the next 3 weeks in rehearsals and shows was the *only* reason I walked through that door for our first hour together.

Our first session was, as expected, awkward. We needed to figure out how to start, how to communicate and if we jived as human beings. Where to begin on such a massive undertaking was no small feat, but she came prepared with some old monologues that she had performed or had seen in her years of studying. I realized quickly that I needed her help to attain quality and memorable material and to perfect that into a polished piece - ready to show Colleges what I had to offer. Still skeptical, I committed to meeting once a week with Sherri either at her office or at her home in downtown Louisville.

I couldn't tell you how many sessions we had. I am sure my Mom paid a pretty penny, but soon I had two contrasting monologues ready to go (with a Shakespeare on hand) and then I brought my book of 16-bar cuts that I had prepared with my voice teacher to our lessons. Sherri helped to select the 2 best songs and helped make each of the 4 pieces (the two 16-bar cuts and 2 contrasting monologues) different so I could show all the different sides of myself and the most variety possible. I practiced slating, doing them in different orders, practicing what would happen if I got cut off, and any interview questions that could happen. I was prepared for anything that "the room" could throw at me. She helped me with my resume, my headshot, and took me shopping to find the perfect outfit that showed my personality and fit all 4 of my performance pieces.

Audition season came and went. Sherri was there via text or phone whenever I needed to vent about how horribly I did at Unified, when the accompanist played my song completely wrong and I had to start over, or when I got accepted on the spot at Millikin

I ended up attending Wagner College in NYC and luckily during that time Sherri's husband lived in the city on a work contract. I would get a nice piece of home every time she came to NYC. Whether she came to my campus or I met her for dinner with her husband in Manhattan she always made sure to check up with me. Eventually, I graduated from school, moved into Manhattan, Sherri and her husband moved to Indianapolis and my family moved away from Kentucky so our story should have been over. However, we talked often, mostly during my life transitions, whether it be about my first survival job, making money/surviving in NY, auditioning, theatre, she was always there to lend a ear and help me get through my 20s (which we all know is tumultuous). My favorite part of our story is when Sherri became pregnant she told me she wanted me in her baby's life no matter what. After her son came into the world I have flown to Indianapolis many different times to hang out with her super cool spawn (and her).



Sherri's Son & I

I can honestly say having a mentor to help me through my senior year of high school was just the beginning of what turned out to be one of the most important relationships of my life. After 12 years in NYC I am excited to be back to where it all started and give back all I have learned through my undergraduate & graduate studies, certifications, and work & life experiences. My goal is to be there for high schoolers in the way Sherri was there for me, to help them kickstart their lives starting with this seemingly small event of an audition that will no doubt lead them into their destined futures!