

To the Editor:

January 12, 2018 felt like the culmination of a lifetime of preparation and years of hard work, love, hate, and passion; every lesson, practice session, talent show, performing for my grandparents in the living room, had all been leading to this. January 12th was the night I accompanied a two-person performance of *The Last Five Years* at Gateway.

My brother had introduced me to the show nearly two years before. I hadn't been able to hear the music from his cell phone properly, as we were listening to the soundtrack on the bus to school before sunrise through shared headphones that only played in both ears when held just right. It would take me a few months, but eventually I would fall in love with the show.

Flash forward to the winter of my eighth grade, Christmas morning. It was a gift meant for my brother Dawson, but I think we agree that I would become more attached to it in the coming year. A book of sheet music for piano and vocals, nearly all the music from *The Last Five Years!* In February I took one particular song to my piano lesson, "Moving Too Fast". I knew it would be a serious challenge but would sound fantastic in the end. When I was comfortable enough playing it, I selected another song from the show to study with my piano teacher.

By March, Dawson had held some brief conversations about performing this 2-person musical with his friend Margaret. I'm not sure at this point if anyone knew how serious that would become.

In the fall, we applied for funding from the Gateway Education Foundation (GEF). The Gateway Education Foundation is an organization that funds projects of all shapes and sizes for Gateway classrooms and schools. From STEM projects to family literacy nights, history programs, field trips, and the arts. GEF is primarily funded by donations, at events like Open Houses, Homecoming Weekend, Gateway Night at the Springfield Thunderbirds, and the annual Giving Tuesday campaign (more on this later).

They agreed to fund the licensing agreement with Music Theatre International to enable us to self-direct, stage, and perform the show. In return, we agreed to accept donations at the door for the Foundation. By working with us, GEF gave us the opportunity to perform this show and made this project something we could feasibly do.

On a more personal note, and speaking to anyone interested in accompanying a show in the future, you have no idea what you're getting into. It's not the rigorous rehearsal schedule and countless hours of outside work, it's the fact that accompanying a show is a unique experience. As the soloists sing and rehearse a you learn a few lessons. One.) That when the people around you slip up, you have to be there for them. Countless times Dawson or Meg would miss an entrance, or skip an entire verse, or take some artistic liberties with the tempo and not tell me. These are times where you have a matter of seconds to figure out what's happening, and how you're going to fix it for the sake of the show. If you hold your own at the expense of the singers, it leaves the audience with a lower view of the show as a whole. Two.) You have to know when it's your moment. There were times where I would be playing something extremely difficult, or a run that I absolutely adored, but it was not helpful if I played too loud and buried the singers. We're all working towards the same product, and each has to understand where they fit into that. And Three.) No matter how terrifying something is, you can

do it with practice. If I'm being honest, there were sections that I could not play consistently until two weeks before the show. But, with practice and hard work, they can be done.

These are all lessons that do not only apply to playing piano for theatre. They're lessons that I can take to other fields, and use what I've learned to be successful. Accompanying this show is not something I would have gotten to do without the support of the Gateway Education Foundation. And most of GEF's funding comes from donations. Ordinary people with \$15 to spare. If every Gateway family gave \$15, GEF could fund a project like this eight times over, fund a life-changing project for twenty-four students. So I ask that on November 27, Giving Tuesday, you donate to the Gateway Education Foundation.

I ask that you donate so that even more students can have the kind of life-changing opportunity that previous donors made possible for me.



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