

THE HANDPRINT ON MY HEART

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“So much of me, is made of what I learned from you. You’ll be with me like a handprint on my heart,” taken from the song “For Good” from the musical Wicked. People come into our lives for a reason. Some believe that the people we encounter are due to destiny or fate. I believe that the people we encounter give us direction; direction from heaven. I have been blessed enough to have been guided by many different people. The things I have learned from them have helped to establish ethics that I live by, each and every day.

Sometimes, the people that make the biggest impression upon us are the ones that are older than we are. Ones we look up to, especially those who are willing to take the time and pass on their knowledge. This is what Heather Culotta did for me. Heather and I share an enthusiasm for music. When Heather realized how passionate I was about music, she took me under her wing, helped me and encouraged me, and passed on tricks that she had learned along the way. She taught me so much that I would not have discovered without her. Heather showed me what following the “Golden Rule” is all about. She treated me as we all long to be treated - with love and respect. She taught me that when you have the ability to give to others, you have the responsibility to give to others. When we give to one another, and reach out to place a handprint, the success of our whole is much greater.

Like friends, family is a guiding light for me when it comes to finding my direction. There are two people who have provided light on my life - my grandmother and my grandfather. I know that they will always, always stay by my family’s side. Even in times when there is disappointment, mistakes or heartache, at the end of each day we are a family, and we love one another. My grandparents have also shown me how laughter is truly a necessity to get through life. Through their stories about the great grandparents I have never yet met, I have learned to treasure and enjoy time with the people I hold closest to my heart. My grandparents have taught me that faith in God is what ignites a fire in us. My “PT” and Papa believe in me, they trust in God, and they remind me, on a daily basis, how great the power of unconditional love is.

Frequently, the teachers that mean the most to us are the teachers who inspire us inside and outside of the classroom. In my case, the “classroom” is more like a small, stuffy, practice room with an out-of-tune piano. But when I am in this space, I am never aware of the flat high C’s and rising temperature, because this is where my thirst for learning is quenched and where I discover new aspects of life. This is where I have a weekly vocal lesson from Barry Busse. Barry has taught me so much about music and has helped me to achieve new heights in my singing. But Barry has inspired me to go above and beyond the notes on the page. He has coached me to understand the power and emotion behind the musicality. Through him, music has moved me in ways that I did not know before. Music is not the only thing that I have learned about. Barry has also taught me about the lessons outside our stuffy practice room. He has taught me that you can always learn through other’s experiences. He is constantly questioning me. What can you learn from this is a question we should always be asking ourselves. I have also learned about the

ability to find joy through others. Barry makes me feel so extraordinary because he finds meaning by teaching me. Barry finds happiness through his students. He finds joy through *others*. This is something that I couldn't have learned on my own which makes it even more precious to me. Barry has influenced me through music and through his life. Each lesson in our practice room is one that I will always treasure.

Usually, people that inspire us most are those who we have known a long time. But, there are complete strangers who can change your entire outlook on life. I met Elisha when I was only nine years old. Elisha was only nine at the time too, but unlike me, Elisha was extremely ill. She had a brain tumor, and she was dying. When the doctors told her there was not much time left, her last wish was to see the Christmas show at Theatre 8:15, a local community theater in which I am involved. We were taken aback. Her simple wish gave us real purpose for performing. For one night, our dancing feet chased away her pain. I'll never forget the way she looked that night. She was swollen and ghostly white ... but she was radiant. Her bright smile and sparkling, tear-filled eyes were those of an angel. Each tear that rolled off her cheek dripped to make a puddle in our hearts. That would be Elisha's very last Christmas; she died on Christmas Eve. Elisha taught me how precious life is and that there is no promise for tomorrow. We should be grateful for each and every day and use each day for the better. I believe that I owe it to Elisha to try to make good decisions, for she didn't have the chance to make many at all. Every decision counts. I will honor Elisha by living the life that I have been given to its fullest; by singing and dancing with all my heart and soul with angels' wings raising me up.

If we follow the guidance that destiny (or heaven) brings our way, through friends, family, teachers, or even complete strangers, we will always be successful. The lessons we learn are principles that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives. I have been so blessed by the people that have guided me by and all the life lessons that I have learned. I hope that I can impact someone's life like so many have for me. Maybe, some day, I can leave a handprint on a heart.