

An Interview with an Actor: Megan Starkman

1. **What is your name and where are you from? Can you provide a brief background into your acting career?**

My name is Megan Starkman, I am from Toronto, Canada. I have been acting on and off for almost 30 years. I have done stage, tv and film. My favourite is stage. I no longer act, but it is something that impacted my life as a young adult.

2. **How did you first get into acting? At what age? How long have you been acting for?**

I got into acting at an early age, around six or seven years old. I have been acting for almost 30 years, I stopped in 2020. I tried to do some online acting and vocal classes but realized that it was my time to move on.

My mother performed on stage, and I remember watching her on stage when I was young. By the time I was three, I was making up songs and dancing. My mom said I have always had jazz hands. When I was young, my parents would go to a play and bring home the soundtrack, I would study the lyrics and learn all the songs. I loved to watch musical movies such as Annie as a kid as well.

When I was younger, I was in an after-school program for theatre performing. The person who ran the program is now a top talent agent in Toronto, she helped guide me through the casting process, writing scripts and such at a young age.

3. **What drew you into acting? Was there an influential or defining moment for you?**

Watching my mom act on stage, I think watching her made me want to do it as well. I had a lot of energy as a child, and this was an outlet to express myself.

1. **How did acting influence and impact you as a teen?**

I identify with theatre. It is a way for me to be silly, and as a teen you aren't supposed to be silly. I was bullied for being silly. Theatre was my safe space, where I could be my true self. I ended up dividing my life into two groups- my theatre friends, and non theatre friends. It created some tension as I learned that some of my non-theatre friends were not who I thought they were.

Theatre was also a positive and negative influence on my mental health and self-esteem. Theatre gave me power and I loved it, but it creates unrealistic expectations of a teen girl's body image. It is competitive and being rejected can hurt as a teen.

4. What programs did you use when you were a teen for acting? IE community centre, lessons in dance, singing, acting, acting camps, school plays, etc.

My High School was a creative arts school. People were praised for being authentic, and my teachers were very involved with us being theatrical and giving all our energy into each performance. I also did community training in an acting group. I did dance, singing and acting classes as well. In the Summer I would go to Theatre Summer camps. I was also in a community theatre troop.

5. Do you have a role model in your teen years that assisted with your acting career?

My mother was the first person I looked up to in the industry, she was supportive but never a stage mom. Sometimes, I wish she pushed me a little more when I was younger.

My High School teachers only ever wanted us to succeed. Pushed us to be authentic over fitting into the industry. Pushed us to give it 100% because we would never be happy with ourselves if we gave less.

6. Did you have a specific play you saw that made you want to begin acting?

My first musical experience was Crazy for you, and I still remember going and loving every second of the play.

7. What is your dream role to play, and dream play to be cast in?

I would love to be in Wicked, Rent as Mimi, Les Misérables as Eponine, or a Disney musical.

8. Is there a defining role you did as a teen that you will always remember?

There are a few that stand out for varying reasons. The first is A Chorus Line- I played Diana, it was my last ever play I did as a teen. I was the main singing role in this play, and I sang my heart out. It was a very proud moment for me.

The second is Oliver- where I wanted to play Nancy, but I was cast as Ms. Bumble. My best friend got the role of Nancy. It was the first time I had mixed feels about a role, I was happy for my friend but felt self-doubt in my abilities as an actor.

Finally, I was cast as a flying monkey in Dorothy. I did the whole show on rollerblades. It is a small role, but I was able to be creative and make it my own. I gave it my all, and the audience had an incredibly positive reaction to my performance.

9. How has being an actor impacted your mental health? And what about your level of confidence as an adult?

When I was younger, I thought I had a superhero suit. I thought I could fly when I was on stage, when I became my superhero suit started to crack. I started to care about what people thought of me more, and I let that break me down a bit. I struggled with my self-esteem and self-appearance. I am short, curled dark hair and I do not have the "it" look, which led to me not getting cast in lead roles, I often would be cast as a best friend role. That led to an eating disorder in my teen years. Slowly, I learned that I do not have to be liked by everyone. Acting and theatre brought me so much joy, but also created a lot of insecurity when I was a teen.

I am a very confident, loud adult now. I am highly organized and a perfectionist. You can see that those theatre attributes have not left! I own and work at a gym now. I train clients every day and help them build their own self confidence now.

10. How do you deal with rejection? What would you tell others who are worried about landing a role?

I cried a lot. I felt safe in my theatre troop as a teen as I would almost always be guaranteed a role in a play. When I got an agent and started to audition for Tv and film roles, I faced a lot of rejection. Acting has no job security, you spend a lot of time auditioning and once you land a role, you have a job for a few months and then it is back to auditioning again. I got some small parts in TV shows, but was role was for one or two episodes. I did not get any reoccurring or main roles. I felt like the stage was where I was supposed to be, but everyone thinks being famous and "making it" means being on a tv show or movie.

You do not need to be on a tv show to be famous. Rejection is hard, but never give up on yourself. There is a role that is meant for you, make sure you

11. What is one valuable lesson you have learned as an actor?

Be yourself, be 100% honest, and use that to your advantage. Everyone is rooting for you to succeed, even in an audition. The casting directors want you to give it your all, so show them your true self and be unique.

12. What words of encouragement would you have for teens who are interested in acting but might not know where to go? Any advice or tips?

You can start with your local theatre groups, take some beginner classes. It is never too late to learn something new. It takes time to build your craft, keep practicing. Take risks and get outside of the box.

13. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the importance of theatre to you when you were a teenager?

Do not let others define your path. Theatre people feel a lot, there are a lot of emotions. You must really want it and give it all you have. It is okay to fail, and face rejection but you must give it an honest chance. Theatre gave me a sense of belonging when I was a teen, I had goals and aspirations as a teen. It is important to have goals and maintain motivation.