

"I've Never Seen You Cry"

By Kyla Ross

It was my daughter's first full musical production - audition day! She woke up

with excitement humming her tunes and aiming for the stars. The lead role - that was her goal. Never mind that her actual experience had been limited. After all, it was her FIRST musical theater experience. Still, I played the supportive parent who also tried to instill a sense of realism in a sea of optimism and assertiveness.

Her musical talent had been evident since she was very young. I'm pretty sure that she sang her first word. Teachers would always comment on her talent as she'd belt out her favorite Frozen tune. She wasn't without confidence either, and she felt intensely. Her emotions raw and transparent. So different from me who had years of life experiences that served as reminders of the vulnerability that showing emotion can really bring.

My daughter was committed, excited, and motivated for her audition that morning. I pulled into the circle drive for drop-off, and she bounced out of the car ready to take on the challenge. I was anxious during the day, wondering how it all went. I felt certain that she'd get a part, though I thought that the lead was less likely. Then, the

email came in. A note from the director. She didn't get the lead - there were tears.

The director stated that she was so confident in her audition. She volunteered to go first, singing proudly for the group. The director and her team were so impressed. They thought that she would be perfect for "the bird lady," which had a prominent singing part. She just wasn't quite ready for the lead. Mary Poppins had so many lines and songs, and it really needed to go to someone with much more experience.

I spent the rest of the afternoon practicing my pep talk. I'd rehearsed how I would tell her of all of the times that I had been disappointed or hurt and how you just have to "get back in the game." But, I wasn't prepared for the conversation we had that rainy afternoon. I pulled into the circle drive. Her face was wet and red - eyes puffy. I started with, "How did it go?" That's when the tears started again. She could hardly catch her breath. She explained that she had sung so well and she had burst into tears when they announced the parts. I told her how much I LOVED the song "Feed the Birds" - what a beautiful melody. She then explained that she was so sad and had cried so much in front of everyone.

Through deep gasps of sadness she exclaimed, "I was just SO humiliated! I mean, nobody else was crying...just me."

Feeling her pain, I quickly stated, "It is OK to cry when you are sad. That is not something to be humiliated about." In a sad, sweet voice she asked, "Why wasn't anyone else crying?" I didn't have an answer. Then she asked, genuinely, "Do adults ever cry?" I paused - that's an interesting question to ask. I mean, of COURSE adults cry. Then she sweetly stated, "I've never seen you cry."

I felt a lump in my throat quickly form. Really? I knew that I was hardened to emotion, but I could recall some recent times of sadness and even a few tears.

Then, I realized that perhaps nobody else saw those tears or that emotion...certainly not my own children. It was an emotional moment - a point of vulnerability. There were so many thoughts and experiences clicking in that one moment. Suddenly, pieces of the puzzle were coming together. The distanced relationships in my personal and professional life. The way when any discussion of depth quickly turned to a changed subject when speaking with my parents. The lack of empathy and emotion as I moved hastily through the fast-paced and taskdriven workplace. The lack of connection - true connection. It all came flashing before me with that one statement - "I've never seen you cry."

What was this moment of discomfort trying to teach me? I was left wondering - What happens to a woman who spends

a lifetime holding back her emotions? What would wash away if I just let all of those tears flow freely? Why was I so resistant to vulnerability? Had I learned that creating an internal dam for the tears was protective and safe? Was society somehow sending this message to more women? Maybe it wasn't just me!

The truth is that I was numbing the pain, and in turn, numbing the joy. It was, unfortunately, a package deal. I was missing out on relationships with those who mattered most to me and may not have really known it.

It was in that pivotal, transformative, and life-changing moment that I realized there was work to do. It was in that moment that I committed to finding ways to let down the armor, to feel more intensely without judgement of myself, to acknowledge the pain and experiences of others also without judgement, and to build the connections that make life richer and full of meaning. It was in that moment that I committed to living life as a "Human Being" not a "Human doing."