

A Long Islander Makes It To The Big Apple



Marissa McGowan, the understudy for Eponine in the national tour of *Les Miserables*, trained under Huntington and Northport's best.

By Iris Wiener
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In the classic musical *Annie*, the title character sings about how tomorrow is only a day away. Little did Syosset's Marissa McGowan realize, as she belted out these lyrics at the age of 11 on the stage of Harry B. Thompson Middle School, that her 'tomorrow' would be 14 years later as she took the Broadway stage in the current revival of *Les Miserables*. Now singing "One Day More!" nightly at Broadhurst Theatre, the Long Island native remembers all of the moments that made her dreams a reality.

"It's crazy. It's nuts, this business is nuts," she laughed, considering the road to Broadway. "If anything I've definitely realized how lucky I am to be where I am, because it's just so hard to get here."

After graduating from Syosset High School in 1999, McGowan attended Syracuse University where she was a part of the musical theatre program. Thanks to a friend from college, she got her big break as a member of the swing and the understudy for Eponine in the national tour of *Les Miserables*. "I was beside myself because I was living in New York at the time, and I had two pennies to rub together. I was like, 'This is it! This is my big chance!'" she said, smiling ear to ear.

Eventually the tour was cancelled, but the musical was re-opening on Broadway as a revival, despite the fact that it had just closed three years ago. The actors in the

tour had the opportunity to audition for the new production, and McGowan was the first one up.

"I literally was one of the first people to get off our delayed plane, I jumped in a taxi with a friend of mine, I was trying to warm-up in the taxi, no time whatsoever, so unglamorous, and got to the audition, went into the bathroom, changed my clothes, and walked right in. It was just like boom, boom, boom! I sang two songs and that was it." McGowan was one of the lucky few chosen from the national company.

McGowan loves the Broadway atmosphere, and definitely feels at home. "Being on Broadway is different from my other theatre experiences because you definitely feel like, 'Oh, I've made it, in a way.' There's also a very strong sense of community on Broadway, and a sense of family."

McGowan credits her real family for helping her to get to where she is today. While living on Long Island as a teenager she juggled voice lessons, acting and schoolwork, all with the support of her family.

"My mother was a huge influence, she was so encouraging of me and my sisters, we all did theatre and we all took voice lessons. Every Friday after school she would drive us to Northport to see our voice teacher. We would make an entire afternoon out of it. Because Northport and Huntington are such cute towns, we would go and I would go for my lesson,

(Continued on page A22)

Actress reaches Broadway

(Continued from page A9)

and she would take my sisters for ice cream or go to the park, and then my sister would take her lesson, and we would just hang out," she recalled. "It was a fun thing to look forward to. My parents were very encouraging of it because instead of me only wanting to hang out with my friends every weekend, I wanted to go see a show, or I was *doing* a show."

In addition to her voice lessons, McGowan worked at CAP (Cultural Arts Playhouse) in Old Bethpage where she starred in a number of shows, took classes, and even taught classes- at the age of 15. She notes the importance of local theatre in helping aspiring actors.

"Towns like Huntington, Northport, Old Bethpage...they're fantastic for kids growing up on Long Island. They're a great outlet. When I got to high school and kids started going out and partying, I wasn't ready for that. I knew it really wasn't my scene, so I started getting into the theatre and I became friends with a lot of people who were passionate about what I was passionate about. It is an amazing thing to have a passion when you're a teenager, and to have some kind of a focus.

I think that when you don't, that's when kids get into trouble."

Although McGowan can look back fondly on how she got to the Broadway stage, she cautions up and comers in Huntington to carefully consider their interests.

"If you have something else that you would be happy doing, then you should do it," she said sternly. "If there is anything else that makes you happy, then choose that. Being an actor can be wonderful and glamorous, but eventually, when *Les Mis* closes, I'll be unemployed and I will have to find another job. It's a scary life. But if you can only see yourself being happy at least having done this and giving it a shot, then go for it."

As *Les Miserables* continues to do well on Broadway, McGowan is content to enjoy the moment, but she does like to imagine the future.

"I would love to be a lead in a new production. It would be great to eventually do more television and film. I really want to be able to create parts, and I want to leave a stamp on musical theatre history." If her past is any indication of her future, Long Island has not seen the last of its star.