

With two inches of makeup caked onto your face, the stage lights will still be just as blinding as ever, and even that won't stop you. A colorful skirt, a messy wig, and four-inch heels will do nothing but raise your spirits along with your height. When the platform you're standing on turns around and you hear the audience cheer, you will go on to deliver the performance of your high school career. And damn if I didn't do just that.

Gorging myself on heart-shaped brownie-batter-filled donuts while visiting a friend at the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon, I got the news that my theatre group would be staging *Bring It On the Musical* in June, and I nearly threw my phone across the Dunkin' Donuts. How could a group based in a tiny theatre perform a musical based solely on cheerleading? Someone would surely be getting a concussion.

Regardless, I was excited to be doing such an energetic and edgy musical, even though I knew nothing about it.

"There's a drag role in that show, you know," my friend told me while I tried to gather my senses. I almost threw my phone across the store again. As a white gay boy, one of my favorite television shows is *RuPaul's Drag Race*, and I had been aspiring to play a drag role for a long time—I needed to get this part.

After auditions and callbacks, I refreshed my email constantly in anticipation of the cast list, until it finally arrived. Skipping past the names of all of my friends (*do they really matter right now?*), I found my name next to that of the character La Cienega, a transgender girl and member of the fearsome hip-hop dance crew at the main character's new school. And the part that I wanted.

The rehearsal process was a long and tiring one, but finally, after three months of rigorous hip-hop choreography, demanding high vocals, and countless aesthetic changes, La Cienega was ready for an audience.

On opening night, as I was contouring and highlighting and eyelining and all that jazz, a surge of doubt washed over me. Makeup couldn't cover up my insecurities as someone who could directly relate to my character. I had to go through the same things she did: accepting myself, coming out, educating others, everything. It's draining, having to face the world as someone whom others look down upon, and after experiencing all that my character has to experience, I found new motivation behind La Cienega. I wasn't just playing a part, I was letting the audience see a part of me and showing them that anything said against me or the LGBT community would only make us stronger as individuals and as a family.

To hear such an amazing response to my entrance on opening night was an experience I can't describe well enough. My stomach was suddenly filled with warmth, so much so that I couldn't help but laugh and smile as I pounded my heels into the stage and danced with more passion than ever before. I felt nothing but pure pride and bliss whenever I stepped on that stage, and for the first time ever, I knew that I had completely embodied my character and that I had made great strides in both the theatrical world and the queer community.

Every night during bows, I stood on that stage for anyone who has lived what La Cienega and I have lived; for the drag artists who could make a living only by performing; for the queer activists of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, who continue to fight for equality and acceptance; and for the next generation of the world that will hopefully see what the audience saw in La Cienega every night. I stood on that stage representing myself, my people's history, my people's struggles, and above all, my people's strength.