One might think that if a person had spent 17 years of their life living in an area, that person would know about the standard town festivals and events—especially if those events attracted major stage, film, and TV stars. Unless that person was me.

I grew up in Pound Ridge, only 10 minutes away from Vassar College, but I spent many years in the dark about the school, and especially about the Powerhouse Theatre Program. I would always drive past signs during the summer that said "Powerhouse Theatre Main Stage Now Running" on the main gate, but I thought that it was some kind of private or school-only event. It wasn’t until I got heavily involved in theatre that I realized what a big deal the Powerhouse program is.

I was doing some Internet browsing one day and saw that the Powerhouse program was mentioned in a Playbill.com article. I saw the many famed alumni and supporters of the program, most notably Meryl Streep, Josh Radnor, and John Patrick Shanley. Then I read about their Apprentice Training Program, and saw that they had a directing program. The Powerhouse program is run through Vassar College in conjunction with New York Stage and Film (NYSF), a theatre production company located in New York City. They have both professional "Main Stage" productions as well as a training program. The apprentice program is open to actors, directors, and playwrights, and gives the opportunity to train in a conservatory-style program for five weeks.

As an aspiring director, I knew how hard it was to find good directing opportunities like these, and this one was in my own backyard! I decided to apply. I visited the website often, eager for an application form to be released. I talked to anyone and everyone involved in the program, asking questions and gathering information. It was truly an exciting experience. I had never applied for something of this nature, and it seemed like the perfect point in my life to go for it. Even more exciting was that after going through the application process, I got the acceptance email and the description of how our time would be spent for the summer.

Walking onto the campus, I knew immediately this was going to be one stimulating summer. At our first orientation meeting, the only advice we were given by the staff members was to "Be Open" throughout our experience. Be open to new things, different practices, people, anything. Keeping that in mind really allowed me to have a fruitful experience.

That first weekend, we were given the standard welcoming talks, such as housekeeping rules and safety procedures and codes of conduct. But we were also randomly placed into groups and given the task to create a play in less than three days. It was like a giant "WELCOME!!!" and a sign of what we were in for the next five weeks.

From then on, the average day for a directing apprentice started with a trip to the "Deece" dining hall for breakfast and then off to either Kenyon or "The Mug" for class. We took classes in stage composition, script analysis, acting, movement, and sound painting. Each class was 90 minutes long. Acting and playwriting apprentices would take similar—if not the same—classes on the same schedule. We would break for an hour lunch, and after that, the day got interesting. Each of the directing and writing apprentices were assigned to shadow multiple shows or projects, either in the apprentice community or the professional NYSF productions. After lunch, the directors and writers all broke off into their different projects for blocks of rehearsal from 2:50 to 7:10 P.M., and the acting apprentices went into rehearsal for their own shows.

Depending on the project, you were either highly involved or observing. However, nothing you were doing was passive. The Powerhouse staff made sure that each apprentice was getting something out of being in each room, and the staff would hold round table discussions with us at the end of each week to hear about what we were learning in our shadowing assignments. Then the nights would consist of whatever anyone was up for: late walks to the local pizzeria, line memorization, card games in the common room, piano jam sessions in the parlor, or scene rehearsals. The important thing is that no matter what anyone was doing, each of us was always welcomed.

You are probably thinking, "Wow, what a busy schedule!" And it was. However, among all the busyness came a moment of realization. I thought to myself, "If I can survive this conservatory program, this tiring and grueling period, and still actually enjoy what I am doing, I know in my gut that I can make it as a director."

The Powerhouse community is such a fantastic one to be a part of. It is a place of knowledge—to expand your knowledge of theatre and enlighten you about new techniques, styles, and methods. It is a place of creativity—with the NYSF mission statement devoted to developing new work, one of the most amazing things is being able to watch a play grow and develop and change over that short workshop period. It is a place of opportunity—the opportunity to meet people, to learn something new, to try something different. But most importantly, it is a place of openness. The community at Powerhouse is one that will accept you for whoever you are, encourage you to challenge traditional ideas, and help you learn more than you thought was physically possible in five weeks (and then some). It is an intense experience, but one of the best you may ever have—one that you will carry with you for years to come.