

My hands shake. I try to control my breath. The spotlight hits me. What usually feels like a comforting glow now seems harsh and invasive. I prepare myself to speak, praying that the words don't get stuck in my throat. I steady myself, and say "I shot them. And then I shot myself."

When I was given the opportunity to go to Scotland to perform in the largest theatre festival in the world, the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, I was ecstatic. I couldn't wait to find out what show we would perform in this magical place. After much contemplation, a piece titled *The Amish Project* was chosen. *The Amish Project* was based on a true story about a man named Eddie who entered an Amish schoolhouse and molested and shot the girls there. In the aftermath of the shooting, the Amish community reached out to the Eddie's widow and they dealt with the hardships of their losses together.

When the cast list went out, I anxiously scanned the sheet for my name, and read the name listed across from it... Eddie. My breath hitched in my throat. I couldn't fathom playing the role of the shooter, and found myself drowning in self-doubt and worry. However, after processing the news, I arrived at the realization that my director believed I had the ability to play the role, and cast me because she knew that I could do the character and story justice. She believed in me, and I could believe in myself too.

Portraying a school shooter who wanted to molest young girls came with a lot of emotional baggage. Following each rehearsal of the shooting scene, I could be found crouched backstage, shaking and feeling nauseous. I continued to push myself, though, and made it my mission to bring the character to life. By the time I was performing in a dingy black-box theatre in Edinburgh, I was able to present a character who wasn't simply a shooter, but was also a loving husband and father. Of course, it never stopped being difficult. There wasn't a single performance where I didn't break down afterwards. But on the beautiful streets of Scotland, something magical happened. People who had seen the show recognized me. They told me how moving my performance was, and that they couldn't imagine how challenging it must have been. As people continued to approach me, I knew I had done something special. I took something that seemed impossible and turned it into something I excelled at. I made an impact on people from all around the world.

Today, as I sit writing this essay in St. Louis, Missouri, there is someone in Texas, someone in Washington D.C., someone in London, someone in Edinburgh, and countless other places who saw our story and was touched by it. That is truly invaluable. Through presenting Eddie to an international audience, I discovered that there are truly no limits to what I can do. The visions of people lining up in the cold to see our show, the standing ovations partnered with thundering applause, and the compliments I received on the streets may seem like a dream, but

through my determination I made them a reality. Pushing past my fears allowed me to gain confidence in my abilities and possess the knowledge that I had impacted people by sharing an inspiring story of unimaginable tragedy and forgiveness. I know I will never have an experience like playing Eddie in Scotland again, but my newfound confidence and curiosity continue to push me to take risks, and I know that with each day I become a better person because of it.