



By Morgan Saaf

# PUT YOUR HANDS ON YOUR HIPS

*A theater geek provides  
an insight into the drama  
of Drama...*

I had landed in Orlando on the Disney College Program, and chose to stay there after my term was over. The friends I had made had returned to their native lands. I was just barely hanging on to my job by the skin of my teeth, and my roommate and I were on less than good terms.

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Instead, we ended up with none other than the Rich Weirdoes who performed at Universal City Walk every other weekend on Fridays and Saturdays at midnight.

*Joe threw me a wrench and an "I'm too pretty to be real" smile as he bolted backstage to get into costume. I tightened the last few bolts on the lights and flipped them on as Katie strolled onstage in nothing but a towel.*

*"Has anyone see my wig?" She bellowed at me and the remaining tech members doing last minute repairs and touch ups, hands on her hips. I sighed. Actors could be so pushy. I pocketed the wrench and clambered across theatre chairs to get to her.*

*"Did you check the wig heads?" Chris and James poked their heads in from offstage, only half in makeup, James in very tight gold shorts.*

*"Katie, where are your extra fake eyelashes?"*

*"Did you check my makeup case?" She paused for a moment as they both nodded emphatically. "Ask Ally."*

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*She borrowed them last."*

*"ALLY?!" They disappeared again as Ofir walked by, glancing at his watch.*

*"Five minutes till we let in the audience."*

*"Lights are set. Katie, check the wig heads."*

*"Props set?"*

*"Morgan, I checked them already--"*

*"Props set. Check again, Katie."*

*"Sorry I'm late!" Logan walked in holding two wig heads and I let out another sigh as Ofir chucked quietly to himself. "Parking was awful. There's so many people out there!"*

*"It's Saturday. Of course there's a lot of people."*

*"Actors, backstage!" Ofir bellowed as Katie snatched her wig back from Logan, glowering, and brandished it at me.*

*"This is why I want to do Rocky instead of Magenta.. No. Respect."*

"The Rocky Horror Picture Show" is known internationally as a cult classic – everyone should see it at some point in their life.

Seeing it live is a "devirginization," as the cast likes to call it. Each cast performs it as a tiny family of strange outcasts banding together. And I was one of those outcasts.

I joined on a whim, and for some friends who were interested in the same things I was (theater, mainly).

My duties on cast were fairly normal. Every show, I sat on the light board and flipped each switch at the appropriate time, and when it was necessary, I worked a makeshift spotlight.

When the shows were over, I put away the equipment, occasionally helped an actor out of a costume, and went out to dinner with the cast and crew.

On weekends when we didn't have shows, I spent it with James, Chris, and Katie, helping them plan parties and playing video games. Sundays were rehearsal days, and the rest of the week while I was at work I spent it wishing it were the weekend already.

On my first few days of cast, I was put under the protection of our supreme ruler, Ofir, the person who made all major decisions from casting to props to other shows that we'd produce.

He was the mother hen to a nest full of chicks, and was trying desperately to teach them to fly. He watched from the wings during shows, and was a constant presence in all our lives. He didn't judge, he didn't humiliate, he didn't preach – he just loved, no matter what.

I was picked up by James, and his boyfriend Chris, almost as soon as I joined. They were quickly joined by Katie, Kourtney, Ally, Andrea, and Julie. I was let in to this inner circle of very close friends as if I had been there for years.

Chris and James were the ringleaders, they owned a condo together and rented out rooms to two differ-

ent cast members. They called their house The Gnome Home although I never understood why.

It became known as the GHC, and I soon became a frequent guest and visitor to their house. James and Chris lived together, and were as different as night and day. But they were always happy, and James and I built a relationship that angered and sometimes alienated Chris.

Gossip, malice and lies ruled the world of the young cast members – the older had become immune to its sting. Katie was its queen, and while I was at her side, I was sheltered from her double-edged sword.

Kourtney stood on her other side like a poisonous snake, which was prominently displayed by the tattoo on her right forearm. She complained constantly of the drama and intrigue that surrounded her but still thrived on it. We lived off lies and deception, and were all too scared to admit it to anyone, even ourselves.

No one was innocent. The GHC certainly wasn't. Their gossip and lies made them one of the most hated groups on cast, but somehow everyone wanted to be friends with them, and get invited to their parties.

It was like being in high school drama all over again- the popular kids were still popular, no matter how awful they were. It was shocking to me that grown adults could act just like children, but that was simply how the cast operated.

The big shiny happy family that I had once seen was actually a turf war. Orlando was the battlefield, and new cast members like me were fresh recruits. The cast was split into houses, which were generally decided by where you hung out the most frequently.

Without even knowing it, I had been recruited into a house and was now proudly waving a flag I didn't even know I was carrying.

The GHC was one of the newest houses, a baby in comparison to others. They were the leaders of the cast revolution, as old members left, new ones stepped up to take their place and claimed it as theirs. The GHC was the youngest and the most inexperienced.

The two oldest groups separated themselves from the rest of cast, and were seen as a privilege to join, like the most exclusive of fraternities. The Ladies Auxiliary was made of mostly large gay men, and Eldeen Johnson's and The Three Winds Adventuring Company, were mostly the cast nerds. If you were accepted by one of the two, it didn't matter what you did, who you dated, or how you acted – you were in. And I wanted in.

Other small cast houses had rivalries and bad blood between them, mostly the result of rumors, lies, breakups, hookups, and too much alcohol.

The parties at all of the houses were notorious, but especially the GHC. The three bedroom condo became a testament to too many shots, not enough clothing, and James and Chris's very public relation-





ship battles

While they seemed the happy adoring couple to the rest of the world, the minute there was alcohol involved (which was more often than not) they instantly became a hopeless mess. Usually they were both wrong, and the fight was pointless anyway. It broke up friendships and created rivalries that were unnecessary.

It was a gauntlet getting to shows on time. Everyone applied the bare minimum of their makeup at Chris and James's condo and ate a hurried dinner, normally comprised of fast food while people screamed over each other and blasting music.

After all the appropriate bags of supplies and makeup cases for later use were piled into the car, we follow suit, screaming at whoever was last (normally Kourtney, who was notorious for taking an extra hour in whatever she did) to remember to lock the door, and grab the last of whatever we had forgotten.

The shows became a blur of bad jokes and inappropriate humor about everything from the Holocaust to the Columbine shootings, to the latest celebrity deaths.

Backstage was a constant disaster of moving props, people performing quick changes and spontaneously getting naked, and nothing was ever in the right place. Chaos was normal for a Friday and Saturday night for us, and ended in a very early morning dinner/breakfast at Denny's around 3 or 4 a.m.

Afterwards, it was back to the GHC to deliriously play a few drinking games and then pass out from sheer exhaustion and drunkenness. It was my life, and I was oddly in love with it.

*"Wake up." Katie shoved me with her foot as I looked up at her from the floor of her bedroom and groaned, pulling a pillow over my face. "It's almost 4 p.m. C'mon. We have stuff to do."*

*"I was supposed to go to work today," I mumbled under the pillow, trying to get my head to stop spin-*

*ning.*

*"I called in for you hours ago. They think you're home sick with the flu." I peeked out from under the pillow and smiled "You owe me one."*

*"My hair hurts." I complained as she kicked me again. "And that's mean."*

*"And by 'You owe me one' I mean you owe me Taco Bell."*

The usual style in which we celebrated birthdays was with drunken games filled with margaritas, Jack Daniels and loss of clothing.

What started out as an evening of silly fun turned into a blur. On Jessica's birthday, I woke up wearing somebody else's pants, my hair soaking wet, and in bed between two people that I didn't remember falling asleep next to.

Terrified, I stopped drinking, and decided that I had had enough of the blur that was my life. I blamed it entirely on the GHC, thinking that my lifestyle choices were largely their doing.

I switched sides in the middle of the turf war, and moved my alliance elsewhere, to Sean, Danny and Tony, whose house was known as the Warhammer Kids.

The result wasn't pretty. I found that people who had once been my best friends chose to turn against me, and that I no longer was worthy of their friendship. Thus, Sean and Danny became my second home, and a refuge in my times of uncertainty.

They didn't ask many questions as long as I provided them with baked goods and decent conversation. They knew the constant drama and pressure to pick a side and stay there was finally taking its toll on me, but if they ever saw me crying over nasty words or comments, they never said anything, and for that I was grateful. We spent our time watching movies, playing video games, and frequenting the local bar for karaoke night.

*"Morgan? Are you home?" Danny called up the stairs as I turned down his TV and held out a plate of cookies as he walked in. "What kind?"*

*"White chocolate macadamia nut. Your favorite." He eyed me suspiciously and bit into one and melted onto the couch. "No occasion. I was bored. Sean left a couple hours ago for school."*

*"Ok. Tony should be here in an hour. We're going to Devaney's tonight. Is that cool?" I nodded and sat on the couch next to him as he tucked his arm around my shoulders. "I won't make you sing this time."*

*"Thank god. Are we going to the show tomorrow?" He shrugged and eyed me carefully. "Katie's not going to be there. She's visiting family."*

*"You can't avoid them forever." I shrugged and stole a piece of his cookie and popped it in my*

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*mouth. Life was finally getting normal, why would I go back to that craziness?*

*"I can try."*

Sean and Danny were roommates, and Tony lived at home with his mother, but sometimes it seemed as if all four of us were living under the same roof. But Tony's and my relationship was tumultuous and largely based on Sean and Danny's roommate/best friend relationship.

When Sean and Danny fought, so did we. I always took Sean's more emotional, needy side. Tony sided with Danny's more logical rationale. And when a particular woman became between them, Tony and I declared our sides and parted ways. It was the end of Sean and Danny's friendship and thus the end of the house.

Squared was of the six main members of Eldeen Johnson's, among them were Derek, James, Cross, BriPie, and Jake.

They were the nerdiest, sweetest, most obnoxious men I knew, but I loved them all like they were brothers.

But Squared stuck out to me in the crowd. He was anything but normal, but in a sea of less than normal, he was a refreshing change of pace. He became a life raft to cling to when things got too strange or too much to handle.

Our occasional meetings became much more frequent, and soon I sought him out at every party, and at every function. His jaded, syntax packed commentary on our surroundings always made me smile, and while he soaked in being the center of attention wherever he went, he always had time for a private conversation with me.

I made it a habit to always help in the kitchen at parties, since I no longer drank at them, and somehow, Squared always found his way to me, and we would end up laughing and serving drinks to our friends together for hours.

He had become less of his nickname, Squared, and more as a real name, Brian. I never told him that in my head I didn't use his very well known nickname. It was my secret. Inside his crunchy, flamboyant, stereotyped shell was a gooey marshmallow center, and I relished in the idea that it was all mine to see.

*I glanced at my phone for the fifteenth time in about 20 seconds as Sean held a brush in front of my face perilously and glared at me.*

*"If he's coming, he'll come. I have to finish your makeup and then do my own. So sit still!" I closed my phone with a snap and looked at him harshly.*

*"I don't care if he comes or not. I just thought it'd be nice, since it's my first time and all. He did help me out at rehearsals." Sean sighed at me and looked at my makeup one last time. "You're done. Go*

*change. And stop worrying. He'll come."*

*I sighed, stood up, and ran down the tiny flight of stairs separating the changing areas. Three new people I didn't recognize flew past me to get more props, screaming directions at actors. A high heeled shoe narrowly missed my head as someone called an apology and it was followed by the second heel. I ducked behind the girl's courtesy curtain and pulled my corset on a bit tighter and attempted to continue breathing despite my urge to vomit.*

*"Hey, the Eldeen Johnson's boys came." I heard James's voice on the other side of the curtain and ripped it back, as girls changing screamed and protested. I ignored them. "Hey Morgan. Squared's here."*

*"Oh. That's cool." I shrugged and shot a look at Sean, who smiled and continued his makeup, mouthing 'I told you so' at me.*

And so the Florida autumn turned into Florida winter, and Brian came to me to fulfill a favor that had been agreed upon because of actions that further proved I should stop drinking.

I was thrown in a car and taken to Key West. That's right. The Florida Keys. Brian chose to spend his birthday in a hotel room in the Keys with me, BriPie, Jake and Nicole.

I imagined it to be like every other random endeavor I had been on recently – filled with alcohol, unruly boys, and hangovers the next day. After seven hours in a car and driving through the night, he surprised me by pulling up to a beach and parking to watch the sunrise.

No alcohol, no mess, just us and the sunrise on the Atlantic coast side. Nicole, BriPie, and Jake found something to occupy themselves with while Brian and I dared each other to climb the outcropping of rocks.

And finally, we were really actually alone. For the first time, there was no obligatory party going on around us, or anyone to disturb us. We talked for what seemed like days about everything, anything, and nothing.

We barely noticed the sunrise or that the tides were changing. I was so close to finally trusting someone in this tumultuous, strange new world, that I was thrilled. Nothing could go wrong.

However, Nicole had different plans. In the secrecy of girl talk, she confessed to me that she liked Brian – my Brian. I took a good hard look on my actions of the past few months, decided I didn't deserve him, and let her have him. I fell asleep on the car ride home and pretended that our emotional wonderful talk had just been a silly dream of mine.

By the time we got home, I started going back to calling him Squared, and started avoiding the exclusive family that I so badly wanted.

It was only at this point that my old GHC family took me back. Ego bruised, and not willing to talk

about my personal heartbreak, I continued to stay sober, avoiding parties where I might see him and say something too honest.

The New Year came and went with the New Year's promise that I would drink, party, and kiss in moderation this upcoming year. Nicole had overstayed her welcome and was removed from social existence but I still avoided Squared, and the boy behind the nickname.

My world went back to being harmonious and filled with laughter and good memories, albeit with my constant avoidance of Brian.

Unexpectedly, I couldn't avoid him anymore. The Rich Weirdoes were invited to perform at the University of Northern Florida. We were getting paid enough to build new props for the next year, and the school was a three-hour drive away in Jacksonville.

The cast exploded with rivalries after a brief reprieve of peace, and the cast list was the most highly anticipated event since the Halloween show.

Many of the GHC members refused to attend if they weren't going to be offered main roles. I knew

that our director needed extra people, so the few of us who decided to attend created a carpool with a couple of other members of cast, including Brian, and caravanned to Jacksonville.

By the end of the evening, Brian and I were talking again, and about everything. Nicole was forgotten, and cast rivalries melted away.

I trusted my instincts and fell in love.

Brian and I have been together for almost a year now, despite the fact that I moved back to Chicago in March of 2009.

The Rich Weirdoes remain the largest, most popular shadow cast in Florida, and I am now considered a retired cast member.

My life slowly is reverting back to normal, and after several months of living back with my family, I've been sober and smart since the day I left Florida.

Houses and groups with strange names that held so much drama and appeal a year ago are disbanding.

Every three months or so, I go back to visit. But doing the time warp again just doesn't hold the same magic.



Morgan Saaf and fellow members of the infamous GHC group shared laughs, gags, and tears.