

## Who is Jonathan Larson?



Vander Ritchie  
Co Editor-in-Chief

I don't understand Jonathan Larson. To be fair, I haven't tried very hard. For a while, I just assumed I wasn't much of a fan.

Larson is most famous for writing Rent, which I hate. Rent is a retelling of Puccini's La Boheme, one of my favorite operas. Rent just substitutes Paris's Latin Quarter with Manhattan's East Village, the 1840s with the 1980s, and tuberculosis with HIV/AIDS. Rent leaves a bad taste in my mouth. It just doesn't seem realistic. It doesn't seem like something anyone actually living in poverty in New York in the 80s would ever write. In Rent, suffering isn't an obstacle to overcome but is the explicit goal. It's not surprising that much of Rent's story was directly plagiarized. It explains just what irks me so much about Rent. Rent is inauthentic

But before Rent, there was Tick, Tick... Boom. It was originally an autobiographical solo performance about

Jonathan Larson's experience writing and failing to produce his first musical, Superbia. It's powerful, funny, and catchy. It's truly one of the best musicals ever written. And it's eerily close to Rent. It has many of the same beats. But Tick, Tick... Boom is authentic and vulnerable. Characters don't want to suffer, they are actively hurting, and want to escape. The real antagonist is not his friend who sold out, it's time. Every character is flawed and has reasonable motivations. It makes sense. It feels real.

Jonathan Larson died in 1996 at 36, the morning of Rent's first off-broadway preview. He was killed by undiagnosed Marfan syndrome. He is an incredibly interesting person to talk about because he was only famous posthumously. We never saw what he would have done after Rent. To me, Rent feels incredibly immature and insecure. To me, it's clear that Rent was Jonathan Larson's attempt to appeal to theatrical audiences. He had failed over and over to get his work off the ground despite their evident quality. His plays weren't palatable, or too expensive. They failed not because of their quality, but because of the inherent politics involved with theatre.

Earlier this month, I at-

tended ThesCon, an annual Theatre Convention in Denver. As part of the convention, we saw a high school present their play, supposedly the best in the state. This year, another high school produced Clue, which we did two years prior. While watching them perform, I grew annoyed. Because we did it better. The actors put more work into their performances, the timing was tighter, and the blocking was more complex. But there were things that we just couldn't do, mostly due to budget limitations. They had a big, complex set, and they had a live pianist to play the music. It was frustrating. They had a better production because they were a bigger high school, with a bigger budget. In a lot of ways, I know that must be how Jonathan Larson felt. He must have felt frustrated that the reason his plays failed was completely out of his hands.

The spoils don't go to who is the most talented. I really love acting. I've devoted more than half my life to it. And, honestly, it's a little worrying to know how difficult it is to make it. But I love it, and I want to pursue it. Rent, Larson writes, "Forget regret, or life is yours to miss." I'm here to live my life the best way I can, there's no day but today.

## Holiday traditions



Karli Bainbridge  
Staff Reporter

Christmas time has always been magical to me. There are certain traditions that I hold close to me. Since I was little Dad had always been in charge of putting up Christmas Mountain. My garage was full of tangled lights and 20+ year old Christmas decorations all year round.

When it's time, Dad loads them in his truck, and starts up S Mountain. My mom, my brother and I were always beside him helping him and the volunteers. I vividly recall all the late nights, turning on the mountain before it was time, making sure it looked okay. All the untangling of lights and the painful falls over the sharp rocks. All the times of lying on the cold S looking over the town. A couple years back my dad let me design my own light creation. It looked like a purple firework and was proudly broadcast over the town. The experience was so important to me and some-

thing I looked forward to. But this year was different. My father decided to completely throw my constant begging and pleading aside and give up being the leader of setting up the lights. Something I held so close to my heart was pulled away with no remorse. I know my dad had good reasons to let this beloved thing go, but this tradition has just really taught me how to love the holidays.

Although the task was always something that was tiring and laborious, the outcome was so worth it. My family and I were the ones who lit up the during the Parade of Lights. While people waited with magic in their eyes, we flipped the switch and the mountain turned on. My dad loved the mountain too. It was a special bond for our family. My dad told me I can still volunteer, but I don't think it would feel the same. I think he just doesn't know how special it felt to know the town depended on us for one of Salida's biggest Christmas traditions.

I know I may sound whiny or dramatic, but honestly this was such an important part of my life. I am still excited to see S Mountain lit up, but it will take some time knowing that it's not mine anymore.

### Tenderfoot Times

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## Heard in the Halls

What are people saying at Salida High?

"I look like a feminine Dutch girl."  
Male staff

"She's nice but she's also just like if a Saltine cracker came to life."  
Senior

"I'm a bougie baby."  
\*While eating four dollar baby food\*  
Sophomore

"Cinnamon makes me feel uncomfortable."  
Junior

"Flemish people live in Austria, right?"  
Freshman

"When I die I'm going to sucker-punch ALL of my ancestors."  
Senior

## Diverse characters: finding yourself in literature



Olive Ritchie  
Staff Reporter

When I was a kid, I was content constantly reading books with practically identical main characters. Divergent by Veronica Roth, City of Bones by Cassandra Clare, and The Unbecoming of Mara Dyer by Michelle Hodkin. Books with straight, white, female protagonists. These days, I feel like it's boring to only read books with these kinds of protagonists. Eventually, the characters start to sort of mesh together.

One of the wonders of reading is seeing people similar to you in a book. Having uniform protagonists hinders this spark. I don't think I would've fallen in love with reading as much

as I did if I didn't find characters I connect with Kids who don't fit into certain categories — white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, and able-minded specifically. It's discouraging to not see yourself in books. For me, it's hard to connect with characters from classics because, on a superficial layer, they don't represent me, even if the characters might actually be complex and realistic.

People say that increased diversity in books is forced and implausible. But "forced diversity" is simply representing a wider array of people. The world is diverse, so characters within books should be diverse too. Reading about characters I relate to is fun, but reading about characters different from me gives me a broader perspective and a more open mind. I'm not automatically going to know about cultures other than my own, so I have to take the time to educate myself. While I know fiction isn't going to give me the most factual overview, it is

a fun and easy way to learn. With this comes the responsibility that falls upon the author's shoulders: listen to the people represented in your book. If you're representing a culture or group of people that you are not a part of, get information directly from that group of people. Someone misrepresenting a culture they're writing about could lead to a greater misunderstanding of that culture. Supporting diverse authors is a huge part of promoting diversity in books; no one knows how to write about a specific group better than someone from that group. Afro-Dominican author, Elizabeth Acevedo has written some amazing books-Clap When You Land and With the Fire on High, that both feature Afro-Dominican protagonists.

Diversity in novels is an integral part of learning about other cultures or groups of people. There are diverse characters in every genre. Examples in fantasy are Cemetery boys and A

Dark and Hollow Star, and in classics there's The Color Purple. Honey Girl, my current favorite book, is a realistic fiction book with a ton of diverse characters. Diverse books are very important because a lot of the joy of reading comes from the connection between

a reader and a character they relate to. I also believe "forced" diversity is not as big of a problem as some people make it out to be. Diverse books are everywhere if you take the time to search for them. It is imperative to search them out.

## The things we leave behind



Lucia Zettler  
Website Manager

My family crowded around a granite stone engraved with my grandmother's name. A tall oak towered over us, its overhang shading us from the muggy Ohio heat. I listened to the soft buzz of my grandfather's beehive as he spoke. "Linda was a complicated woman," Grandpa Zack spoke slowly and solemnly of my grandmother.

I picked at my cuticle nervously, shifting my feet. Think about what you are going to say, I chided myself. But really it wasn't difficult. As I listened to Grandpa Zack retell my grandmother's life, dozens of memories replay in my head.

I remember looking at her as she sat in the living room of their Ohio cabin on their faded blue couch that smelled of moldy mothballs. An array of art supplies lay scattered on the kitchen table where I sat, frustrated by my inability to create art like hers. Where her strokes were careful and graceful, mine were sloppy and too thick.

My grandmother's love for art was apparent in the various paintings scattered around the cabin and in the gift boxes that arrived at our house, usually full of art supplies. Despite my lack of talent, I always found a use for her paper and paints, creating amateur pieces to show her. When she was sick, I used her paper to make a get

well card, with the phrase "Don't Stop Believin'" painted onto it. The words were messy, and I no doubt used the paint incorrectly, but she kept it, turning my art into dozens of little cards. Later, she sent them to me, accompanied by a letter written in her elegant cursive.

More often than not, the art supplies were the only thing in those boxes that she ever actually bought. The other gifts were little things she found around the house. I imagined her and my grandfather parading around their house in West Virginia searching for things they thought my sister and I might like.

Opening her gifts was almost always an adventure, peeling back the tape of the shipping box to discover what peculiar items we would find. Sometimes she would put tiny old dolls in the boxes, their little dresses frayed and faded; or worn out puzzles with their backs peeling from years of use.

My grandmother died in November of 2020, and the boxes and art supplies stopped coming. In our basement, my family still has a drawer of thick paper and paint brushes from her, which usually stay untouched. Recently, I found a letter she sent me along with all the birthday cards she wrote me while cleaning out my junk drawers. While reading it, I recalled everything that my grandmother was.

She certainly wasn't perfect, but she was a unique person who had a passion for her family and the world around her. Despite our arguments, and those times when I felt like she didn't understand me one bit, I am endlessly grateful that she was a part of my life.

## It's you and me against the world



Scarlett Campbell  
Assistant Editor

Sometime in 2009: I am four, and my mother and I are in the car driving aimlessly around the city we once, and still call home. "Telephone" by Lady Gaga and Beyonce is blasting, my mom and I are ecstatic.

"Mom, you be Beyoncé, I'll be Lady Gaga, okay?" In English class, I was asked to write about the person I feel knows me best. The answer is no doubt, my mother.

My mother was born into a family of her parents and three older brothers, all of which are significantly older than her. Although she was close with her brothers, her childhood was what she and I like to call, "chronically lonely" as her brothers

were out of the house and in college by the time she was nine. 24 years later the cycle repeated itself. Now, I'm the only granddaughter, niece, and female cousin surrounded by four boys who are all, in turn, significantly older than me.

From the time I was born to now, my mother and I have always been close. When I was born, my mother was a single mother working her butt off trying to support us and make sure I had a good life. She gave me a childhood that was filled with endless car concerts to all the hits of the 2000s, professional photos every six months complete with custom outfits and her always being there. Every field trip, school party, room parent opportunity, no matter what it was, she was there.

Our relationship, like all family relationships, have their challenges, but my bond with my mom definitely became stronger after my illness. When I was seven, I became incredibly sick and was eventually diagnosed with 2 rare autoimmune diseases. I spent two

and a half months in the hospital doing an endless amount of procedures and tests and taking over ten medications, it only continued for another 6 months.

Although this time was filled with fear, uncertainty and utter exhaustion, it also held endless bonding moments between my mother and I. Spending time building paper castles and doing crafts within the seemingly lifeless walls of a hospital room, holding my hand and singing the Notre Dame Fight Song every time I had blood work done, which was unfortunately often. This time period proved the phrase that she and I have always said, "It's you and me against the world."

My mother recently had a birthday in November, and I can only hope that she knows how loved and appreciated she is by everyone she meets, everywhere she goes. I mean it when I say that my mother truly is my idol, biggest supporter, number one fan, drive for success and my best friend, forever.