

Little bear's big debut



At 10:30 a.m. on July 10th, 2015 in Harford Community College's Black Box Theatre, Collin took to the stage for the first time, less than two weeks from his sixth birthday. At that very moment, a star was born.

In reality, Collin has been putting on performances his whole life. He loves to be the center of attention, especially if he can make others laugh. Word for word he reenacts scenes from his favorite movies. It started right around the time he turned three and developed an interest in "Toy Story." He would call from the other room, "Mom! Have you seen my Sally doll?"

The first time, I was confused. "What doll? We don't have any dolls."

"Mo-om! You're supposed to say, 'What, Dear? What was that?'"

I said my line to Collin's relief.

"Nevermind," he said, picking up a stuffed bear in the same way that the little girl picks up her Sally doll in "Toy Story."

He had only seen the movie twice, but he remembered who said what and what they did. It continued on through other movies and TV shows, even though we don't allow our boys to have too much screen time. His memory is astonishing. He's seen The Little Rascals twice within the past couple of weeks and walks around saying lines from the movie, encouraging the rest of us to participate in the "scene" with him. (He's our little director.)

When the opportunity presented itself for Collin to be part of a stage production, I enrolled him for theatre camp at Harford Community College. It was led by none other than our wonderful next door neighbor, Ruthie. Collin was a little hesitant the first time I dropped him off on Monday, but he bounced all the way to the car when I picked him up, eager to show me his script for Friday's big show. The play was about four gentle people, ten terrible trolls, and one sweet bear with the capacity to be scary when danger strikes.

You can probably guess who Collin got to be – the bear. He didn't have any lines to rehearse, but he did have to practice his growl and his "tricks." We "rolled over" in the lawn, across the living room floor, and through a pile of towels on my bed. I told Collin to "roll over" while we were in the car and he reminded me that he needed to stay buckled in. I made him growl, instead.

After four days of grueling rehearsals, the young cast was ready to present their play to a public audience. Friends and family filled every available seat just in time for the lights to dim. Soon, four actors were on stage playing humble villagers, one of whom had a pet — you guessed it — bear. Collin came waddling in wearing a brown fur suit and ears. He had a black nose and whiskers. He was so overwhelming cute, it took all my strength to keep from stepping into the scene and squeezing him. But, he had a job to do, and boy did he do it well. His tricks were flawlessly executed and his growl managed to scare all those nasty trolls away.



Before we knew it, Collin was taking his bow and finding himself mobbed by mamarazzi who wanted pictures of their kids with the cute bear. (I can't blame them.) The buzz of excitement continues to exude from an already exuberant child. It appears as though he's caught the acting bug — it's probably hereditary.

Patrick and I met during a high school production of "The Crucible," so we have firsthand experience of the benefits theatre offers young people. Being part of a play gives kids the opportunity to work on memorization and verbal skills, to be a member of a team, to problem-solve on the spot, to gain self-confidence, and to have fun pretending to be someone else – maybe even a bear. I can't wait to see what Collin's next role will be!

There are still some spaces available for summer and fall acting camps at Harford Community College. Find out more about these and other summer programs [here](#).