

David Thompson & Family

TIP Performer

My family has been attending Theatre in the Park since I was a kid in the 1980's. I remember they used to charge \$1 per head in each car! There were no fences and dogs were allowed in the bowl! My parents brought my brothers and me to shows every Summer, and it became a love of mine hoping someday I would be in a show on that huge stage!

Before ever auditioning for the Park, my brother and I started dance and voice classes at Miller Marley School of Dance and Voice. A bunch of kids from our studio auditioned to be munchkins in Starlight Theater's "Wizard of Oz" in 1990. My brother and I auditioned but did not get cast. In 1992, Starlight was once again looking for local kids to be in "Peter Pan" and this time, I got in! My younger brother, Drew, didn't audition because he remembered how upset he was when he was rejected from "Wizard of Oz." When he heard I got cast as a Lost Boy at Starlight he was disappointed he didn't audition. That was when Drew auditioned for TTIP! That Summer, Drew was in "Gypsy" as one of the newsboys and was the first of our family to do a show at our family's favorite theater!

The next Summer, Drew auditioned with me at Starlight for "Oliver" with Davy Jones. We both got in and were orphans and pick pocketers. Working with Davy Jones was one of our favorite memories.

The next Summer (1994), Drew and I auditioned for "Peter Pan" at TTIP. I was cast as John Darling and Drew as a Lost Boy. The audiences were HUGE! It was such a thrill for me to get to "fly" above the stage in a nightgown and top hat! Definitely one of my favorite memories in my first ever TTIP show!

Drew and I continued performing at the Park through the 90's. Drew also performed in Carousel, King and I, and Sound of Music as a VonTrapp child. I was in Hello Dolly(1996) and Guys and Dolls(1997).

The Summer of 1997 became a life changing Summer for me out at TTIP. The Park organized a "Meet the Cast Picnic" where all 4 shows got together for a picnic at Shelter 4 in Shawnee Mission Park. This was significant because it's where I was introduced to my future bride! My cousins, Sarah and Amy Arnott, were in "Crazy for You" that Summer and introduced their Miller Marley friend, Celia Needleman, to me at the picnic. Celia was also in "Crazy for You" that Summer and my cousins told her she had to meet me! Celia and I hit it off and dated all Summer and into our Senior years of high school. We lost touch in the Fall both being active at our separate schools...her St. Thomas Aquinas and me Olathe East.

Celia went off to Missouri State University and pursued her Musical Theatre degree. I stayed home and went the JCCC/KU route for school.

Celia went on to perform for a few years in Branson in "Joseph...Dreamcoat" and "Lost in the 50's." She saved her money and then moved to NYC to pursue her Broadway dreams. Celia never made it ON Broadway, but performed in regional theaters and even toured in the National Tour of "Beauty and the Beast" as a Silly Girl and Belle's understudy.

During this time, I continued performing here in KC. My entire family of Arnott's and McCroskey's were all in the 2000 "Peter Pan" at TTIP. My brother and I were also in the 2004 "Guys and Dolls" at TTIP.

In 2005, my family auditioned for and all made "Beauty and the Beast" at TTIP. It was that Summer when I started doing theater year round. My love for performing which was already strong, became a passion. I started performing year round at the Jewish Community Center, The Barn Players, OCTA, and the Chestnut Fine Arts Center.

In 2007, I was cast in the role of "Willard" in "Footloose" out at TTIP. This role was my first featured role at the park since John Darling in 1994. My confidence as an actor became stronger

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and stronger from this role and the years following. My soon to be wife, Celia Needleman, even came and saw Footloose that Summer with a friend and told her friend, "That was my High School boyfriend!"

I didn't know Celia was in the audience until years later when we reconnected.

In the Winter of 2008, Celia got really sick with Grave's Disease and was forced to come back to KC for radiation treatment at KU Med. While she was home, we randomly reconnected through Facebook. We met at Tanner's Bar and Grill in February 2009 and caught up. We hadn't talked or even seen each other in 10 years! After learning about each other's 20's (we were 28 and 29) we once again started dating. She decided she was ready to move home to KC permanently and 6 months later we were engaged!

That Summer before I proposed, I was cast as the Cowardly Lion in "The Wizard of Oz" out at TTIP. This was a dream role for me and another on stage life changing moment for me as an actor. Celia wasn't only a performer, but a talented artist. Every night of our performances for Oz she would meet me in my dressing room to paint my Lion makeup on me. A week after we closed Oz, I proposed to Celia. We were married the following June.

After our first year of marriage, I had the opportunity to audition for "Joseph...Dreamcoat" at the New Theatre Restaurant which was a "bucket list" theater for me to perform at. I got in the show as one of the brothers and performed 8 shows a week all Summer while keeping my full time day job. It was a lot of fun performing professionally and checking a theater off my bucket list!

During our first 3 years of marriage, Celia and I auditioned as a "package deal" at various theaters throughout Kansas City. If the show wanted her, they had to take me and vice versa. We performed at the Jewish Community Center, Chestnut Fine Arts Center, and TTIP. We both made "Legally Blonde the Musical" in 2012. I was Emmitt and she was Serena. Once again, several of my family joined us for our awesome Summer in Legally Blonde! One night before our call for Legally Blonde, Celia and I went out to Shelter 4 in Shawnee Mission Park and had a private picnic celebrating our 2 year anniversary and 15 year anniversary of when we were introduced at that very shelter.

After that Legally Blonde Summer, Celia and I decided it was time to start our family. 9 months later, Tenley Shea Thompson was born! We took the next two Summers off from theater out at the Park, but Celia got the itch in 2015 and landed the role of "Maria" in "West Side Story." Celia killed it like she always did, but this was particularly special for her and me as Tenley, who was now 2, attended all 7 performances and was glued to "mommy" on the stage. Every time she stepped out on stage Tenley would stand up and point to mommy. I think that's where our next generation was bit by the theater bug!

Celia and I performed in "Joseph...Dreamcoat" in the following Summer and once again, Tenley was at every performance watching mommy and daddy perform. My parents said she was perfectly still every performance unlike most 3 year olds. From then on, we would take Tenley to any musical in town because she loved it so much.

In the Fall of 2017, we took Tenley to an audition for the National Tour of "Waitress the Musical" that was touring through KC and needed a 4 year old to be in the production. Tenley got it! She performed on the Musical Hall stage and did incredible! We were given the decision for her to sign up for her Equity contract which Celia had previously been a part of! It was pretty special and funny that Tenley's first on stage experience resulted in a Broadway credit!

Our second little girl, Piper Quinn, came along shortly before the "Waitress" experience. And once again, it was very obvious our little one had theater in her as she, like Tenley, sat still and watched any show we would take her to!

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Last Summer, I was Sebastian in "The Little Mermaid" out at TTIP. Celia and the girls were at all but one performance dressed in "My Dad's a little Crabby" outfits! The love of theater for our family of 4 was continuing to grow!

And finally, this past February, Tenley got to have her very first TTIP audition experience! Not only did she audition, but so did mommy and daddy! The callbacks were challenging because Tenley is still a beginner reader. She was called back for 3 of the shows and had to memorize all of her materials!! To our surprise, she memorized all of it! Such a little sponge!

A week later, Tenley landed the role of "Molly", the smallest orphan, with Celia also cast in the role of "Grace" in the musical "Annie." I will be reviving my role of the Cowardly Lion in "Wizard of Oz" at the end of the Summer as well!

We are all looking forward to sharing the stage this Summer as a family. I remember when Tenley sat at age 2 watching Celia play "Maria" with great anticipation of mommy coming out onto the stage, and am excited to experience Piper this Summer at age 2 watching mommy and her big sis! The Cowardly Lion was special to me 10 years ago as I experienced it with Celia, but I am looking forward to experiencing the role this time around with all THREE of my girls in the audience!

All in all, this will be my 15th show at Theatre in the Park. I have grown up on this stage from the Park's 25th Anniversary in 1994 to the 50th in 2019. My love for musical theater began outside every Summer at TTIP with my family in the 80's, and continues with my own family of four 30 years later! The Theatre in the Park is and will always be in my heart!