It's Time
Lisa Marie Belopotosky

Dr. Virginia Carroll asked her students in College English I (ENG10001) to use their observational skills to write about and reflect upon a place that was significant in their lives. In “It’s Time,” Lisa Marie Belopotosky revisits a place—the Players Guild of Canton—that shaped much of her life. She suggests that re-experiencing memories from special places helps us to understand how we build our lives.

I, like most people, have a place from which I got my start, a place that gave me the inspiration and encouragement to move on. My particular place is just a small, overlooked rehearsal studio in the basement of a local theater. Over time, the Players Guild of Canton has become very special to me, like another home. The people there have taken on the role of my second family. Aside from the main stage, the rehearsal studio is my favorite place in the entire theater. The studio has seen both my best and my worst, and I gained so much during the time that I was there. Though it may seem extremely difficult, there comes a day to leave that special place and go forward into bigger and better things. After leaving the first time, no one should go back right away. Doing so makes departure harder to deal with, but one must go back eventually. After a lengthy absence from an environment, it is important to go back to re-experience the memories, both good and bad, and rekindle the reason for building a life there in the first place. I have moved on, grown up. Though many of my goals and priorities have remained the same, some have changed. I do not have the time for the studio as I did before. Still, it continues to be a part of me. I have been away from my place for far too long. The moment has come when I can finally say to myself, “It’s time.”

As I enter through the stage door, I am immediately overcome with a sense of comfort and excitement. In front of me lies a staircase—four flights rise above me, and two flights descend below me. They are dark and not necessarily appealing to the eye, but to those familiar with what they lead to, traveling either way on one of these ordinary flights of stairs shows the way to a world of indescribable expression and enjoyment. Knowing what lies before me, I choose to go downward, into the shadows. There is absolute silence in my surroundings. Every move I make seems to be amplified in the stillness. I make my way down both flights of stairs to a corridor. After following a series of poorly lit hallways and passing by a few closed doors, I have found the way to my destination. The door is shut, but not locked—it is never locked. As I grasp the silver handle, I glance up to the fading words printed on the heavy, wooden door: Rehearsal Studio. Instantly, I am hit with a flash of the past. Above the silence, I faintly hear songs and laughing. Smiling, I turn the handle and thrust the door open.

The studio is brightly lit, yet it is empty. As I look around, I notice that not much has changed. My footsteps echo as I walk on the wooden floor to the center of the vast room. The wood beneath me is painted black and very worn from the hundreds of hours of people shuffling around or dancing upon it. Scattered on the floor in what used to be very elaborate outlines, are pieces of colored tape. The tape has now tattered away, but each piece represents something special. It was all used long ago, in the place of set pieces and drops, during a play or musical throughout the “blocking” stages. That tape spread in the studio is as significant as the production’s program—but not necessarily to the same people. The audience barely cherished the booklet, the show, and the final product. The people who were directly involved—the leads, chorus members, dancers, backstage crew, and directors—value so much
more than that.

Momentarily drifting from my thoughts, I keep wandering around the room. I am startled when I see movement, but then realize that I have been away far too long. I had not remembered the effect of the floor-to-ceiling mirrors cascading over one wall of the studio. The mirror’s primary purpose was obviously for the dancers of any cast, but I can remember times when it was used for other reasons. Before every evening performance, the cast was required to meet in the rehearsal studio for vocal warm ups. I, being the time-ignorant person that I am, was always running late with my make up, hair, and wardrobe. I would bring my make up or bobby pins into the studio and finish primping myself as I was singing. I was the tail end of many jokes for my rituals.

Remembering my amusing habits, I stroll over to one of the three doll, gray, cement walls and run my fingertips over the surface. The wall is worn and has chipped away with time. Oh, the events that have occurred in this room! If these walls could talk, they would tell the most amazing stories; conversations between all sorts of unique and eccentric people, the casting process including the most bizarre auditions, little kids—and adults—deviously getting into trouble, and hundreds of amazing tales told by the most wise and experienced theater veterans. Though I have had a number of memories attached to this place, it would be only a small fraction of all that has occurred here, before my time. I can clearly remember my first experience in the studio. I was just eleven years old. Up until that age, I was always prancing around my house, singing at the top of my lungs. I had always loved singing, and the thought of actually practicing my skill had seemed so far-fetched. Advertised in a local newspaper was a Vocal Production Class to take place at the Players Guild, in the rehearsal studio. That class was my stepping-stone. I realized that with dedication and the proper training, my talent could take me places that I never thought possible. It was a great feeling.

I re-experience that feeling as I saunter along the edge of the studio, my hand still running along the wall. I come to a halt when I stumble upon a couch, an aged, black leather thing that has a block of wood propped under one leg to keep balance. The couch has not always been in the studio. I remember the days when it was upstairs, in the green room, used to make stage mothers, anxious auditioners, and cast members on break more comfortable. At a younger age, I did my share of lounging on that couch during rehearsals. Once the theater stumbled into some extra money, they refurbished the green room with new furniture and carpeting. The black leather couch was demoted and moved downstairs for tired, sweaty singers and dancers.

Still standing, I bend over to run my hand over the exterior. It is familiarly soft, yet it has a few rips and tears on the seat that I do not remember. I conclude that these deformities are a result of another generation’s lounging. Gently, I sit down to recall the feeling of comfort the couch had always instilled in me. I lean my head back, resting it on the top of the couch, and look up toward the high ceiling lined with pipes and vents. Music and words could penetrate through the ceiling from upstairs and sound as if it were happening in the next room. I remember one occurrence, while I was still new to the theater, when I had a bit of an encounter with the infiltrating sound. I happened to have a class in the studio while a performance was in progress. While warming up, I was abruptly alarmed by what I thought to be a loud crack of thunder, followed by rain and hail. The others in the class chuckled and informed me that the performers onstage were tap dancing directly above us. I soon became familiar with the “horrific” sounds throughout the room. When I was in the cast of particular musicals, such as “A Christmas Carol” or “Plain and Fancy”, I had a great deal of time between scenes. I would wander down here, lie on the floor or couch, and stare at the ceiling. I would start thinking differently about everything around me. Emotions would come over me while hearing muffled dancing, singing, and sets being moved, making me realize that there was no other life for me. This indescribable exhilaration took over my body, mind, and soul, making even the most run-down studio seem like a glorious kingdom. This kind of environment was and still is my home.

My gaze is drawn to the doorway directly in front of me. It is not the door through which I entered. It is a door that I have been through but once, leading to a dark hallway and staircase.
Many generations of children and teens have sought pleasure in telling tall tales to new friends about the haunted staircase. Legend has it that during one of the first productions of the seasonal classic, “A Christmas Carol”, a tragedy occurred. During a performance, a woman named Elizabeth was hurrying down the dark staircase when the bottom of her costume got caught on something and she tripped. As she was falling, a part of her dress wrapped around her neck and she choked and died. Every year since, the Ghost of Elizabeth has haunted the stage right staircase during the run of “A Christmas Carol”. I remember being informed of the exaggerated story, and being quite terrified, but now I realize that no production would have been complete without the “haunted staircase” stories finding their way into discussions.

I stand up, realizing that my time here is coming to a close. As I start to drift toward the door, something catches me from the corner of my eye. Turning around, I am astonished that I almost passed up such a significant part of my history in this studio. Sitting in the corner, as it always has, is the grand piano. What was once such a radiant-looking instrument is now aged and in some aspects, ugly. The wood, once fresh and polished, is ruddy brown, dull, and chipped. The ivory keys are so worn that the wood beneath is revealed. The old piano has seen so much; strenuous rehearsals develop into amazing productions, intimidating directors become powerful teachers, shy singers turn into rising stars, and mere acquaintances evolve into dear, dear friends. I know the piano wasn’t brand new when I was a familiar face here, but to me, it was and always has been an astounding instrument. It brought people together. I remember, very clearly, my last night in the studio. Someone was sitting at the piano, playing the theme song from the old sitcom, Cheers. A group of close friends and I stood in a circle around the piano, with our arms around each other, singing “You wanna go where everybody knows your name…” I get tears in my eyes just thinking about that moment. It is one of the best memories I’ll ever have.

My time is through. I turn my back to the piano and slowly walk to the doorway. I turn around to look at the room one last time, to absorb every detail. To any ordinary person, the studio may seem empty, but to someone such as me, it is abundant with emotions and experiences. The last element that my eyes fall upon is the mirrored wall. The only movement that the mirror reveals is just an old friend, back to relive the memories and atmosphere, after an extensive absence. I know I will be back, when it is time again for me to re-encounter my past and remember my companion.