

THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
SCHREYER HONORS COLLEGE

SCHOOL OF THEATRE

# STAGES OF LIFE

A STUDY IN MUSICAL THEATRE AND ERIK ERIKSON'S  
EIGHT STAGES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a BFA in Musical Theater  
with honors in Musical Theater

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## ABSTRACT

The first part of my thesis is a live solo performance (with an accompanying script) that integrates an overview of psychologist Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Psychosocial Development with musical theatre songs, monologues, poems, and stories related to each of those stages.

Weaving together eight performance pieces, each one related to a stage of Erikson's theory, will bring together my two main academic pursuits while at Penn State: musical theatre and psychology.

It also allows my solo performance to dramatize the shape of a human lifetime, traveling from infancy to adulthood and innocence to experience. In that way, it provides an opportunity to reflect autobiographically on my own growing up, especially at this transitional moment when I'm on the brink of leaving the safe confines of school and entering into the "real world."

The second part of my thesis is this essay, which presents a brief biography of Erikson's life and accomplishments, an overview of each of his psychosocial stages of development, and an explanation of why I selected the specific songs/dances/poems/stories that I chose to illuminate each stage in my solo performance.

Overall, I hope that the audience who sees my solo performance, and the readers who encounter this written overview of it, will come away with a greater understanding of how musical theatre literature can be used to interpret and understand psychosocial theories about the human experience.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction and Biography

Throughout my life, two of my main areas of academic interest have been psychology and musical theatre. When it came time to develop my Honors Thesis, I wanted to find a way to combine these two disciplines. As I have studied and performed in a variety of musicals during my time here at Penn State, I have noticed that so many songs, scenes, and dance sequences feature characters struggling to overcome an internal crisis. I started to detect a pattern of this—whether the characters were battling to be in control of a situation, to find purpose or direction, to be loved and included, or to accept their lives and feel they have made a difference in the world. Since musical theater is, after all, a reflection of humanity, I found myself wondering if there was a psychological theory that described these universal human experiences that were so apparent in both characters and in my own personal life. This is when I encountered the work of Erik Erikson.

Erik Erikson was a psychological theorist born in Frankfurt, Germany in 1902 to a Jewish mother—Karla Abrahamsen—and an unknown Danish father who abandoned Abrahamsen while she was pregnant. Therefore, the first central male figure Erikson came to know was his eventual stepfather, Dr. Theodor Homberger, a Jewish physician. Erikson had difficulty coming to terms with the fact that he never met his biological father and this feeling likely contributed to his eventual theories about connectedness in early development. Erikson was teased in synagogue by fellow Jews because of his Nordic appearance—tall, blond, and blue-eyed—that was markedly different than Abrahamsen and Homberger. At the same time, he was also mocked at his largely gentile grammar school for being Jewish. Whether it was because of these dual instances of taunting or simply for a desire to know the truth, Erikson felt incomplete without knowing his true heritage. In fact, some believe that he later invented his surname “Erikson” because he was completely self-taught and independent—naming himself

“Erik’s son.” His early struggles to fit in and his constant search for biological roots established an internal unrest in Erikson that laid the groundwork for the psychosocial theories he would develop later in life.

Though Erikson had an interest in history, language and art, he did not, in fact, attend university. Instead, he went through a nomadic period of wandering through Europe with a friend, Peter Blos. As Dr. C. George Boeree, a retired professor at Shippensburg University wrote, Erikson was “living the life of the carefree rebel, long before it became the thing to do.” (Boeree, Erikson). Peter Blos invited Erikson to Vienna to tutor art at a small school for American children whose parents were studying psychoanalysis with Anna Freud—Sigmund Freud’s daughter. Ms. Freud noticed that Erikson was especially receptive with children and she encouraged him to study at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute. Erikson took her advice and specialized in child analysis. While there, he also investigated the Montessori method of education, which focused on child development and sexual stages. Because Erikson studied under the influence of Anna, Sigmund Freud’s theories are heavily integrated into Erikson’s work.

Erikson married Joan Mowat Serson—a Canadian dancer and artist in 1931 and they had four children. As Hitler rose to power, Erikson and his family attempted to escape to Copenhagen, but, because they were not able to gain citizenship, they fled instead to the United States. Settling in Boston, Massachusetts, Erikson enrolled in the graduate psychology program at Harvard University. In those days, “European training in analysis was superior to anything to be had in the United States and it was assumed that any ‘export-ware’ from European psychoanalytic institutes, even in like Erikson had only recently graduated, would be far superior to other available talent.” (Roazen, 8). He later became the first child psychoanalyst at Mass General and Harvard Medical School. He eventually left Harvard to work at the Yale School of Medicine, but left soon afterwards because of anti-Semitic attitudes.

Over the course of his career, Erikson developed a theory dividing our life into eight stages of development starting from infancy and ending with late adulthood. He determined that in each stage there is a core crisis. If that crisis is overcome, the individual will obtain specific positive virtues that lead to a

healthy personality and he or she can move onto the next stage. However, if the individual does not overcome the crisis, the negative outcomes could integrate into one's personality and potentially cause problems later in life. Erikson supported the epigenetic principle that if something disturbs development during a critical moment, the outcome of that conflict could stay with the individual for the rest of their life. Erikson believed that "human nature can best be studied in the state of conflict" (Richter, 186). That being said, he also advocated for the effectiveness of psychoanalysis and that, with the help of another person, an individual could address conflicts that had been previously left unresolved.

In many ways, Erikson's division of life into individual stages was a continuation of Freud's theory. Freud, however, focused primarily on the periods of development between birth and adolescence and believed that personality developed by the age of five. Erikson, on the other hand, examined the entire human lifetime, subdividing the development process into eight stages, from birth until death.

Additionally, while Freud's theory specialized in the conflict of the inner self (superego, ego and id), Erikson placed emphasis on the outer self—how the outside influence of culture and society affect an individual's personality. Another key difference between the two psychologists involved differing opinions on two of Freud's most central areas of concentration. Erikson "not only downplayed the role of sex, but also even the unconscious mind, focusing more on interpersonal, social and cultural influences" (Fleming). Erikson did, however, support the notion that the ego played a huge role in representing personality. According to Paul Roazen, Erikson "has grown by moving beyond Freud's conclusions, and, in the course of so doing, he has succeeded in revitalizing the Freudian tradition" (Roazen, ix).

Erikson's research, theories and conclusions were a huge leap forward in the world of psychology as he was one of the first to recognize the vital role of nurture as well as nature in human development. He said that he "came to psychology from art," which explains why he used emotional and observational evidence more readily than scientific data. An important aspect of Erikson's findings was how one's culture can contribute to one's development. After all, he called his theory psychosocial: "psycho" relating to the mind and "social" relating to others. The crises that occur in each stage of development are

psychosocial because they relate to both the needs of the individual as well as how the conflict relates to others.

## Chapter 2

### Stage One: Trust vs. Mistrust

Erikson categorized the first stage of life, from when a baby is born until he or she is about eighteen months old, as “Trust versus Mistrust.” During this oral period of development, the infant depends completely on the mother. As the baby learns the best way to receive nourishment, the mother earns the child’s trust by establishing that he or she is safe and by providing love.

Since the performance component of my thesis featured songs that illuminate each of Erikson’s stages, I choose the song “New Words” by Maury Yeston to reflect this first stage of development. In the song, a mother sings to her baby, saying “turn around and look at me...there’s a light in my eyes now, and a word for what you see... we call it love, my son” (Yeston). Here, she establishes trust with her child, so that he will be able to develop hope and drive. If that criteria is not met, then the baby could be withdrawn and unable to sense the world around itself. It is important that the baby not only receives nourishment from the mother, but also consistent physical contact and attention. Erikson said, “Hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive. If life is to be sustained, hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded, trust impaired.”

## Chapter 3

### Stage Two: Autonomy vs. Shame

Erikson referred to the second stage of development as “Autonomy vs. Shame.” This stage takes place during toddlerhood and early childhood (eighteen months through three years) and is about building self-esteem as the child learns new skills. These new skills include potty training, talking, walking, dressing and feeding. More specifically, Erikson emphasized the critical development of muscle maturation that will allow for a child to master the physical ability to “hold on” to objects, as well as the ability to choose to do the opposite: to “let go” of them. In this way, a toddler can literally put certain decisions into his or her own hands, establishing ownership of their actions and independence from their parents. Adults often recognize, however, that the degree of this independence is severely limited and they instinctively provide assistance and support. It is important, Erikson argued, for parents to be especially patient during this stage of their child’s development and to establish “law and order” while not being overly controlling. Erikson believed that if parents fail to achieve this particular balance, a toddler would eventually feel shame associated with their limited abilities and this could eventually lead to impulsivity and compulsion. Erikson also noted that every culture handles the response to child development differently—especially in this stage. He contrasted the way that American parents teach potty training to children with the approach by parents in the Lakota Sioux tribe—Native Americans based in the Dakotas. While traditional American families employ what Erikson interpreted as a quick and restrictive approach to toilet training, Lakotas don’t force children to learn to control their toilet behavior until they are ready to do it naturally.

When it came to finding musical material about bodily functions, my options were limited. Upon searching, I remembered that I performed in a musical called *Urinetown* in high school. It is set in a town with a severe water shortage where all adults—not toddlers, but adults—are restricted from using restrooms without paying. I played a character named Pennywise who works for the authorities and is

stationed at the toilets to collect people's pay and manage the restroom vicinity. In her song "It's a Privilege to Pee," she sings that "water's worth its weight in gold these days... no more bathrooms like in olden days...you come here and pay a fee for the privilege to pee" (Hollman and Kotis). Though the song was an opportunity to provide humor in the script, it is admittedly connected to the bodily functions that are central to Erikson's second stage.

## Chapter 4

### Stage Three: Initiative vs. Guilt

Erikson's third stage —“Initiative vs. Guilt”—takes place when a child gains independence between the ages of three and five. In this stage, children imitate adults and create imaginary scenarios with dolls or toys to mimic the world they observe around them. They separate themselves from their role as the person being nurtured and, instead, do the nurturing themselves by copying the behavior of their parents. If a child's effort to assert independence from parents is stifled, it can result in guilt, in fear of trying new things, and in a lack of confidence in his or her abilities. This was why Erikson believed that a child's natural desire to imitate his or her parents should be encouraged.

In addition to imitation, children in this stage actively focus on discovering the world they live in. Erikson said, “There is in every child at every stage a new miracle of vigorous unfolding.” In choosing musical material for this stage, I decided to create a video including dance and movement that illustrates the carefree and whimsical nature of this time in life. I filmed this sequence on a beach partially because I have many fond memories during this time of my childhood on the shores of Cape Cod, and partially because the ocean represents dreams, mystery, and innocence. I chose Rufus Wainwright's “Beautiful Child” as the musical background to the dance, because he refers back to this stage of childhood in the song, exclaiming “When I have found my room filled with toys, be banging on my crib excited by noise, oh how I feel like a beautiful child again.” The choreography embodies the freedom of childhood, mixing energetic and lyrical movement with the carefree environment of a sunny beach.

## Chapter 5

### Stage Four: Industry vs. Inferiority

The fourth stage of development is characterized by what Erikson referred to as “Industry vs. Inferiority” and covers the period in a child’s life from age six to age twelve. In these years, the major event is attending school. While social interactions in previous stages are primarily with parents and caregivers, this stage allows for the most significant interactions to be with classmates and teachers. During this time, children strive to perform more difficult tasks as the expectations of school increase. A child supported by patient parents and teachers is more important than a child experiencing immediate mastery of skills. It is support and encouragement that will deliver a sense of competence and self-confidence. Of course, if too much praise is given, it could result in an excess of pride. On the other hand, children who do not receive that kind of reassurance are likely to experience self-doubt and inferiority. In most all of Erikson’s psychosocial stages, the support from parents, peers and others is best delivered in a healthy balance. In James Flemming’s *Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Stage*, Erikson is quoted saying:

“The child at this stage sublimated Oedipal impulses and now learns to win recognition by producing things. He has mastered the ambulatory field and the organ modes . . . . He develops industry – i.e., he adjusts himself to the inorganic laws of the tool world . . . . His ego boundaries include his tools and skills: the work principle . . . teaches him the pleasure of work completion by steady attention and persevering diligence”

For my musical material in this stage, I choose to portray a character that does not, unfortunately,

receive encouragement from parents and therefore seeks it out from other sources. The song is called “My Friend, the Dictionary” from *The 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. The character in this song, Olive, sings about her passion for words and language. She loves the fact that “in one book, is the entire language of our species.” Though she does not have a support system from her parents or peers, she finds comfort in her “reliable” dictionary.

## Chapter 6

### Stage Five: Identity vs. Role Confusion

Erikson's next and fifth stage is "Identity vs. Role Confusion." It takes place during adolescence, between ages of twelve and eighteen. This is the time when we take on big decisions about who we are, what we believe, and the kind of person we want to become. To quote Erikson from Saul McLeod's *Erik Erikson*, "The adolescent mind is essentially a mind or moratorium, a psychosocial stage between childhood and adulthood, and between the morality learned by the child, and the ethics to be developed by the adult." Previous stages stress how the environment (including peers, parents, and school) affects an individual, but, in this stage, the focus is more internal. It is about how the individual discovers his or her own identity.

Erikson wrote that adolescence is a time when "fidelity and consistency to one's core self allows for the formation of identity"—in other words, a person's identity is solidified when they are true to themselves. Oftentimes, in their attempt to discover their identity and assert independence, teens separate themselves from their parents. They may oppose social norms either because they want to challenge authority figures, or because they are trying fit in. In the midst of securing their identity, adolescents tend to care a great deal about what their peers think of them. That is why this age can be so confusing: an adolescent strives to be an individual while also wanting to impress and fit in with peers. In the song "Live Out Loud" by Andrew Lippa and Brian Crawley, the character Sara sings, "I don't want to go along with the crowd.... [but] I don't want to be alone in the crowd."

I found this song especially appropriate for this stage, as it captures the contradictory ambitions of being a teenager. The character asserts her independence and her hunger for individuality, exclaiming "I don't want to go along with the crowd, don't want my spirit broken and bowed, why do you I have to hide

what I'm feeling inside? I want to live out loud!"

To "live out loud" is to proudly exist as the truest version of oneself. Erikson wrote "In the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity." This seems to especially apply to adolescence, which is such a bold announcement of selfhood. Though this stage can be a frustrating one for both for the individual going through it as well as his or her parents, it is also exciting as the individual begins to grow out of the role of a dependent child and into the role of an independent individual.

## Chapter 7

### Stage Six: Intimacy vs. Isolation

If adolescence is focused on the self, “Intimacy vs. Isolation” emphasizes something outside of the self: loving others. This stage takes up a larger part of our lives in comparison to other stages. It occurs between the ages of nineteen and forty. The primary focus is on relationships—not only romantic ones, but also friendships and familial love. During this stage, the nature of an individual’s connections with other humans becomes deeper. Erikson said, “Life doesn’t make sense without interdependence. We need each other and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all.”

That being said, Erikson advocated that two people could only experience true intimacy if they each separately possess a strong sense of self. If an individual didn’t secure a sense of identity in the previous stages of his or her life, that person might have difficulties maintaining close relationships during this stage and experience feelings of isolation and loneliness.

In addition to developing strong familial relationships and friendships, individuals typically meet significant others and begin to think about marriage and having children of their own. Although, in recent years this period tends to occur later in people’s lives as they spend more time in the previous stage of identity formation. Regardless, whenever this stage arrives in an individual’s development, it is characterized by an emphasis on love, affection, and connecting with others on a deep, interpersonal level.

For this moment in my performance, in an effort to explore these issues, and also perhaps provide some comic relief for the audience, I chose to sing an extremely dramatic love duet between Celine Dion and Barbra Streisand called “Tell Him.” In the song, the women confide in one another, describing the feelings of fear when falling in love. Celine sings to Barbra: “I’m scared, so afraid to show I care, will he

think me weak, if I tremble when I speak?” Barbra comforts Celine in response, acknowledging that though she has been there as well and understands, Celine “can’t let the chance to love him pass [her] by.” What made the number especially humorous is that my male friend played Barbra Streisand in drag. We staged it as if he (Barbra) is a figment of my (Celine) imagination, and came to offer guidance and reassurance. Though it was silly and overwrought, the song captured the vulnerability and fear associated with love.

## Chapter 8

### Stage Seven: Generativity vs. Stagnation

The next stage of development takes place during an individual's middle age (typically age thirty-five through sixty-five) and is characterized by what Erikson referred to as "Generativity vs. Stagnation." Erikson coined the term "generativity," but the definition of the word "generative" is relating to, or capable of production and reproduction. So, in one sense, this stage is about an individual raising a family, but Erikson also recognized that life can indeed be fulfilling without having children. Either way, he advocated that this stage requires making some kind of contribution to the world—whether that be in children, work, or charity.

Another layer of meaning for the word "generativity" includes the importance of doing and loving your work. He referred to "work" as both relating to an individual's career, as well as their ability to give back to the community. In a way, the focus over the most recent stages has progressed from the self (Stage 5), to another person (Stage 6), and now outward even further, to the world at large (Stage 7). If an individual doesn't find purpose through some form of "production and reproduction," he or she will feel stagnant and meaningless. In the 2001 article, *Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Stage*, James Fleming quotes Dan McAdams stating that:

"Highly generative adults tend to express a more spiritual understanding of life...than do less generative adults. Generativity is also positively associated with volunteerism, community involvement, and voting. Social institutions such as schools, churches, and government agencies depend on the generative efforts of adults."

Instead of singing or dancing in my performance for this stage, I spoke to the audience about a personal story involving my mother who is currently in this stage of development. The story is about how

my mom developed a children's summer camp in Mirebalais, Haiti to provide support to the community in the wake of the devastating earthquake there in 2010. Through a series of random events, my mom met some Haitian women who built a school and invited her to join them in Mirebalais that summer to help create a camp. It didn't matter that she didn't know any Creole, she wanted to contribute in any way she could, so she and I flew to Haiti in July. As soon as we arrived, she got on the local radio station and invited any kid from age five to fifteen to come join us at Gawouginou School for a summer camp! Since then, my mom has traveled to Haiti every year to help—whether it be teaching math, entertaining the kids with art, music and sports, instructing the teachers on how to teach, or delivering goods for newborns to mothers at the maternity unit in the hospital. With the help of friends from our community, she has donated a plethora of clothing, health, and school supplies to the kids and families of Mirebalais.

In addition to sharing the story with the audience verbally, I also illustrated it with photos in my PowerPoint presentation. It felt right to vary the songs (and dance video) from other stages with a more personal piece of storytelling here, especially because it reflects exactly what this stage is about: giving back to the world in a meaningful way. The fact that this story was recounted to the audience by one of my mother's other meaningful contributions to the world—me—only deepened the resonance in the performance.

## Chapter 9

### Stage Eight: Integrity vs. Despair

The final stage of Erikson's psychosocial stages of life is referred to as "Integrity vs. Despair" and takes place from approximately age sixty-five through death. Events that typically occur during this stage are retirement, the loss of spouses or friends, new concerns about health and illness, and, perhaps, the gradual accrual of wisdom. This is the time when an individual must come to accept the life he or she has lived and is able to reflect on it. For many people in this stage of life, passing on stories and guidance to previous generations is essential. Erikson said, "If there is any responsibility in the cycle of life, it must be that one generation owes to the next that strength by which it can come to face ultimate concerns in its own way."

When entering this stage, it's important for an individual to remember that life is not complete; it is now simply a matter of looking back more than looking forward. Perhaps, even more than "looking back," the vital action during this stage is "looking within." The individual can ask questions: Was it worth it? Was it meaningful? What did I accomplish? What do I regret? What have I learned? Once a person feels satisfied with his or her life decisions, the individual experiences a sense of fulfillment, integrity, stability, and wisdom. Without that kind of self-examination and acceptance, it's possible the person might lapse into regret, guilt, bitterness, and despair.

The feeling that one's life was fulfilling, however, does not mean an individual must believe that everything was perfect or that it was filled only with successes. A fulfilling life is one where you forgave yourself of past mistakes and learned from them, where you attempted to live in balance, where meaningful relationships were cultivated, and where dreams were pursued. If a person looks back on his or her life and recognizes these traits, the despair that this last stage potentially brings can be conquered.

To illuminate this stage in performance, I choose to recite the poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost. I have always loved this poem and knew it would be a perfect summation of this time in life. The speaker in the poem reflects on life decisions and discusses the difficulty of choosing which path to follow:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler...

In life, as in the poem, we can't divide ourselves in two and make both variations of a decision—we must “be one traveler.” And, as in the poem, we don't often have the opportunity to return to a moment of decision and take another approach: “...knowing how way leads on to way/I doubted if I should ever come back.” Instead, we must believe that our preparation and life experience over life's many stages has armed us with the ability to choose well and, hopefully, when reflecting back in later years, we will experience what Frost's speaker asserts at the poem's end: that his choice “made all the difference.”

## Chapter 10

### Conclusions

When I first encountered Erikson's ideas in his book "The Life Cycle," I found them to be both comprehensive and relatable. He managed to take an entire human lifetime and contextualize it in recognizable, emotional terms. Poet W.H. Auden remarked that Erikson's work was so "full of wise observations...about human life... that no quotations could do it justice" (Roazen, viii). In addition to being fascinated by his theory, I choose to study him because, unlike many of his counterparts, Erikson's theory charted a complete life cycle and I knew that I could create a beautiful piece of theater where each stage was dramatized by a specific song, dance, or story.

It would be disingenuous, however, to portray Erikson's work as infallible. Many psychoanalysts find that there is not enough scientific and academic support behind Erikson's theories, a complaint made worse by the fact that Erikson never received a formal college degree (though he did receive a certificate confirming his studies at the Maria Montessori School and trained at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute). Additionally, most of his research was based on observations rather than formal data and case studies. That being said, there have been copious studies done in the intervening years and psychoanalysis have proven that, despite his lack of academic background, most of Erikson's theory is valid and original. There is, however, an obvious lack of application in his work. He offered many ideas about what happens in each stage, as well as how events and relationships affect individuals behaviorally, but didn't suggest solutions. With all that in mind, Erikson nevertheless created revolutionary concepts that laid the groundwork upon which future psychoanalysts could build.

For the final number in my performance, I asked my mom to accompany me on the guitar while I sang "The Circle Game" by Joni Mitchell. This song was an ideal way to wrap up the show, as Mitchell's

lyrics reference a boy who grows and experiences Erikson's stages. In the chorus, Mitchell sings about how we all ride through life, season to season, year to year, and stage to stage, and how we are all ultimately "captive on a carousel of time." The chorus continues: "We can't return, we can only look behind from where we came." In a very real way, this is exactly what Erikson's theory allows us to do—not only to "look behind from where we came," but also to understand it. The human experience is a collection of profound and complex emotional journeys, but Erikson's theory of psychosocial development gives us the tools for comprehending it.

Having spent the year looking for ways to integrate the work of Erikson with my studies in musical theatre, I've come to realize that both psychology and theatre pursue the same ambitious goal: to understand the human experience. It seems appropriate and emotionally satisfying that Erikson chose to organize his discoveries in that most theatrical of all locations: a stage.

**Appendix**  
**Performance Script**

*LIBBY enters.*

LIBBY

Birth is a beginning  
And death a destination.  
And life is a journey:  
From childhood to maturity  
And youth to age;  
From innocence to awareness  
And ignorance to knowing;  
From foolishness to discretion  
And then, perhaps, to wisdom;  
From weakness to strength  
Or strength to weakness –  
And, often, back again;  
From health to sickness  
And back, we pray, to health again;  
From offense to forgiveness,  
From loneliness to love,  
From joy to gratitude,  
From pain to compassion,

And grief to understanding –  
From fear to faith;  
From defeat to defeat to defeat –  
Until, looking backward or ahead,  
We see that victory lies  
Not at some high place along the way,  
But in having made the journey, stage by stage,  
A sacred pilgrimage.  
Birth is a beginning  
And death a destination.  
And life is a journey,  
A sacred pilgrimage –  
To life everlasting.

#### LIBBY

Throughout my life, two of my main areas of academic interest have been psychology and...

*(PowerPoint image: little Libby as a  
young dancer)*

...musical theatre! Musical Theatre totally counts as an academic interest, by the way. I'm about to have a degree in it.

*(PowerPoint: blank image)*

LIBBY (Cont'd)

And when it came time to put together my Honors Thesis, I wanted to find a way to combine these two disciplines. So, you're all about to see what I came up with!

Something I have noticed as I have studied and performed my way through a variety of musicals here at Penn State is that so many songs, scenes, and dance sequences feature characters struggling to overcome an internal crisis. I started to notice a pattern of this—whether the characters were battling to be in control of a situation, to find purpose or direction, to be loved and included, or to accept their lives and feel they have made a difference in the world. And I thought, “Gee, I can identify with that! Isn't that what being a human is about?”

Musical theater is, after all, a reflection of humanity. And I found myself wondering if there was a theory that described this pattern that was so apparent in both characters and in my own personal life. That's when I stumbled upon Mister Erik Erikson.

*(PowerPoint image: Erikson)*

LIBBY (Cont'd)

Erik Erikson was a psychological theorist who was born in Frankfurt, Germany in 1902. Over the course of his career, he developed a theory dividing our life into eight stages of development. He believed that in each stage there is a core crisis. If that crisis is overcome, the individual will obtain specific positive virtues, and move onto the next stage. However, if the individual does not overcome the crisis, the negative outcomes could integrate themselves into their personality and could potentially cause problems later in life. When a conflict arises, it could relate to the crisis that the individual is currently experiencing OR it could have to do with a crisis earlier in their life that wasn't addressed.

*(PowerPoint: blank image)*

LIBBY (Cont'd)

If all this theory went over your head, don't worry. We are about to go on a journey and explore each of our life stages together....

*Music begins: "New Words."*

LIBBY (Cont'd)

LOOK UP THERE, HIGH ABOVE US,  
IN A SKY OF BLACKEST SILK.  
SEE HOW ROUND, LIKE A COOKIE.  
SEE HOW WHITE, AS WHITE AS MILK.  
CALL IT "THE MOON," MY SON  
SAY "MOON.

SOUNDS LIKE YOUR SPOON, MY SON.

CAN YOU SAY IT?  
NEW WORD TODAY!  
SAY "MOON."

*Music continues under.*

## LIBBY (Cont'd)

In the very first stage of life, a mother establishes that the child is safe in the world and helps her baby find its way.

NEAR THE MOON, BRIGHTLY TURNING,  
 SEE THOSE SHINING SPARKS OF LIGHT?  
 EACH ONE NEW, EACH ONE BURNING,  
 THROUGH THE DARKNESS OF THE NIGHT.  
 WE CALL THEM "STARS," MY SON.  
 SAY "STARS."  
 THAT ONE IS MARS, MY SON.  
 CAN YOU SAY IT?  
 NEW WORD TODAY!  
 SAY "STARS."

AS THEY BLINK ALL AROUND US,  
 PLAYING STARRY-EYED GAMES,  
 WHO WOULD THINK IT ASTOUNDS US  
 SIMPLY NAMING THEIR NAMES?

A child must come to not only trust its mother, but also trust itself, learning the best way to receive nourishment. It's essential during this stage of life that a child receives love.

TURN YOUR EYES FROM THE SKIES NOW.  
 TURN AROUND AND LOOK AT ME.

THERE'S A LIGHT IN MY EYES NOW,  
AND A WORD FOR WHAT YOU SEE.  
WE CALL IT "LOVE," MY SON.  
SAY "LOVE."  
SO HARD TO SAY, MY SON.  
IT GETS HARDER.  
NEW WORDS TODAY, WE'LL LEARN TO SAY.  
SAY "MOON," SAY "STARS," SAY "LOVE."

*Music ends.*

#### LIBBY (Cont'd)

So, we just learned about the first stage of life. Erikson refers to this stage as the crisis of "Trust vs. Mistrust." A child is completely dependent on their mother and it is up to her to provide the nourishment, attention, and love that will lead to a trustworthy relationship.

*(PowerPoint image: panda with baby)*

When those needs are met, the child will develop hope and drive.

*(PowerPoint image: elephant)*

Otherwise, they could be withdrawn and unable to sense the world around them.

*(PowerPoint image: Trump)*

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

In the second stage of our life, when we are toddlers, the key event is to learn how to potty-train—

*(PowerPoint image: first child with toilet)*

*(PowerPoint image: second child with toilet)*

—how to walk, how to talk and how to feed.

*(PowerPoint image: first picture of me as an eating baby)*

*(PowerPoint image: second picture of me as an eating baby)*

Surprisingly enough, those potty shots weren't of me. But unsurprisingly, that one is!

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

When toddlers learn to have control of their bodies, they experience a feeling of self-control and ownership. Otherwise, toddlers could feel shame that will lead to impulsivity and compulsion. If toddlers experience immense shame when they don't know how to control their bladders, imagine how adults feel if they can't use the restroom when they gotta go.....

*Music begins: "It's a Privilege to Pee."*

LIBBY (Cont'd)

"TIMES ARE HARD,"

"OUR CASH IS TIGHT,"

YOU'VE GOT NO RIGHT,"—

I'VE HEARD IT ALL BEFORE.

"JUST THIS ONCE"

IS ONCE TOO MUCH

CAUSE ONCE THEY ONCED

THEY'LL WANT TO ONCE ONCE MORE.

I RUN THE ONLY TOLIET

IN THIS PART OF TOWN, YOU SEE.

SO, IF YOU'VE GOT TO GO,

YOU'VE GOT TO GO THROUGH ME.

IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO PEE.

WATER'S WORTH ITS WEIGHT

IN GOLD THESE DAYS.

NO MORE BATHROOMS

LIKE IN OLDEN DAYS.

YOU COME HERE AND PAY A FEE

FOR THE PRIVILEGE TO PEE.

THE GOOD LORD MADE US

SO WE'D PISS EACH DAY

UNTIL WE PISS AWAY.

THE GOOD LORD MADE SURE

THAT WHAT GOES IN MEN

MUST SOON COME OUT AGAIN.

SO YOU'RE NO DIFFERENT THEN

FROM LOWLY ME.

AND I THINK I'LL CHARGE YOU TWICE!

OR BETTER YET, HAVE YOU ARRESTED!

SINCE YOU PREFER THE LAW GETS TESTED.

AND IN URINETOWN, YOU'LL SEE

WHY IT'S DUMB TO FIGHT WITH ME

## FOR THE PRIVILEGE TO PEE!

*Music buttons.*

## LIBBY

Erikson's third stage—"Initiative vs. Guilt" is about a child beginning to learn to take initiative and gain independence. That's why you might see young kids playing with dolls—they are separating themselves from their role as the person being nurtured and, instead, doing the nurturing themselves by mimicking their parents.

*(PowerPoint image: first picture of me mimicking parents)*

*(PowerPoint image: second picture of me mimicking parents)*

These preschool-aged kids are focused on discovering the world they live in. Their one job in this stage is to explore.

*(PowerPoint image: Libby and Zach on the beach as little kids)*

Man, don't you miss THIS stage? When life was as simple and peaceful as dancing on a sandy beach in the morning...

*Music begins: a recording of Rufus  
Wainwright's "Beautiful Child."*

*Simultaneously, a video begins on a  
large projection screen.*

*It is a film of Libby dancing on a beach  
in the morning, expressing the freedom of  
childhood.*

*Libby watches herself on the video.*

RUFUS WAINWRIGHT (RECORDING)

WHEN I AM OLDER THAN THESE SMALL GOD DAMNED HILLS  
AND THERE'S NO REASON FOR MY MIND TO BE STILL  
OH, HOW I'LL FEEL LIKE A BEAUTIFUL CHILD.  
SUCH A BEAUTIFUL CHILD AGAIN.  
WHEN I FINALLY FOUND MY ROOM FILLED WITH TOYS,  
BE BANGING ON MY CRIB, EXCITED BY NOISE,  
OH, HOW I'LL FEEL LIKE A BEAUTIFUL CHILD,  
SUCH A BEAUTIFUL CHILD AGAIN.

*Music ends and video fades to black.*

LIBBY

But I suppose life can't be about playing on the beach forever...

*(PowerPoint image: Ptown girls)*

Sooner or later, no matter what, you have to go to school—

*(PowerPoint image: me as a  
Kindergartener)*

—which is what Erikson's fourth stage is all about.

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

The basic criteria is competency—a child has to learn and feel competent about basic skills—  
math, reading, spelling—

BOY

Miss Rosenfield, your word is “Boanthropy.”

*Music begins: “My Friend, The  
Dictionary.”*

LIBBY

I LOVE MY DICTIONARY.  
 AND I LOVE THE INDENTED BORDER.  
 EVERY WORD'S IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER,  
 ERGO, LOST THINGS  
 ALWAYS CAN BE FOUND.

AND I WRAP MY HEAD AROUND  
 THE FACT THAT IN ONE BOOK  
 IS THE ENTIRE LANGUAGE OF OUR SPECIES,  
 WHICH IS A FAVORITE TERM OF NIETZSCHE'S.  
 WHO'S THE GREAT-GRANDFATHER OF CHRISTINA RICCI'S.  
 YES, I JOKE, BUT THE WORDS IN THE DICTIONARY  
 ARE THE FRIENDS THAT I'LL HAVE FOREVER.  
 MORE THAN THE FRIENDS I HAVE MADE IN SCHOOL.

Boanthropy. B-o-a-n-t-h-r-o-p-y? Boanthropy?

BOY

That...is correct.

LIBBY

MY FRIEND, THE DICTIONARY  
 IS A VERY RELIABLE FRIEND.  
 DOO DOO DOO DOO DOO DOOO  
 BA DA DA DA DA DA.

*Music buttons.*

LIBBY (Cont'd)

Ah, adolescence.

If Erikson were here, he'd say "that time when fidelity and consistency to one's self allows for the formation of identity". But I would say "Ah, adolescence—

*(PowerPoint image: Mean Girls)*

That time when everyone is a bitch to everyone else." It's the time when we're making big decisions about who we are, what we believe, and the kind of person we want to become.

*(PowerPoint image: cartoon of  
adolescent at crossroads)*

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

*Music begins: "Live Out Loud."*

Everybody has basically same journey during the first four stages of life, but in this stage, we all become...individuals.

I DON'T WANT TO GO ALONG WITH THE CROWD.  
DON'T WANT TO LIVE LIFE UNDER A CLOUD.  
GIVE ME SOME AIR AND SPACE  
AND SUN ON MY FACE.  
I WANT TO LIVE OUT LOUD.

DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE IN THE CROWD.  
DON'T WANT TO SEEM PECULIAR AND PROUD.  
I NEED TO BE AS FREE  
AS I KNOW HOW TO BE.  
I WANT TO LIVE OUT LOUD.

EVERY DAY – SLEEP, WALK, LOCK, STEP.  
NO ONE DARES TO STRAY.  
THOUGH THEY MAY—STRAIGHT-LACED, SHAMEFACED—  
LONG TO BREAK AWAY,  
THEY'RE AS LONELY AS CAN BE.  
IS THAT WHAT THEY WANT FROM ME?

I WANT TO RUN DOWN AN OPEN SHORELINE.  
I WANT TO JOIN IN A MOONLIT DANCE.  
I WANT TO SWING WITH BRANCHES OF A TREE.  
I WANT TO BATHE IN A HIDDEN INLET.  
AND LET THE BREEZE COME AND DRY MY HAIR.

I WANT THE LIFE THEY TOOK AWAY FROM ME.

IF THAT MAKES ME HEADSTRONG, FINE!

THAT'S A FAULT I'M GLAD IS MINE.

I DON'T WANT TO GO ALONG WITH THE CROWD.

DON'T WANT MY SPIRIT BROKEN AND BOWED.

WHY DO I HAVE TO HIDE WHAT I'M FEELING INSIDE?

I WANT TO LIVE OUT LOUD.

DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE IN A CROWD.

I ONLY WANT WHAT I'M NOT ALLOWED.

GIVE ME THE WINGS OF A BIRD,

I'LL BE SEEN AND BE HEARD.

I WANT TO SING WHEN MY HEART IS FULL.

I WANT TO SING AND I WANT TO FLY.

I WANT TO SOAR THE SKY WITHOUT A CLOUD.

I WANT TO LIVE OUT LOUD.

*Music buttons.*

LIBBY (Cont'd)

If adolescence is focused on the self, this next stage is about something outside the self, focused on loving others.

*(PowerPoint image: “Calvin and Hobbes” valentine cartoon)*

Now is the time when those “key relationships” are EXTRA important. Happiness in this stage depends on your connections, not only romantically, but also with friends and family.

*(PowerPoint image: intimacy issues cartoon)*

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

I thought long and hard about what song I could sing here. Maybe “All You Need Is Love.” Or “I Will Always Love You.” Or “If I Loved You” or “People Will Say We’re in Love.” But after a lot of serious thought, I realized there was just one possible option.

*Overdramatic music starts: “Tell Him”*

LIBBY (Cont’d)

I’M SCARED.

SO AFRAID TO SHOW I CARE.

WILL HE THINK ME WEAK?

I TREMBLE WHEN I SPEAK.

OOH.

WHAT IF

THERE'S ANOTHER ONE HE'S THINKING OF?

MAYBE HE'S IN LOVE.

I FEEL LIKE A FOOL.

LIFE CAN BE SO CRUEL.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO...

*BOY enters, in DRAG.*

BOY

I'VE BEEN THERE

WITH MY HEART OUT IN MY HAND.

BUT WHAT YOU MUST UNDERSTAND

YOU CAN'T LET THE CHANCE

TO LOVE HIM PASS YOU BY.

BOTH

TELL HIM.

TELL HIM THAT THE SUN AND MOON

RISE IN HIS EYES.

REACH OUT TO HIM

AND WHISPER

TENDER WORDS SO SOFT AND SWEET

LIBBY

HOLD HIM CLOSE TO FEEL HIS HEART BEAT.

BOY

LOVE WILL BE THE GIFT YOU GIVE YOURSELF.

LIBBY

LOVE IS LIGHT THAT SURELY GLOWS  
IN THE HEART OF THOSE WHO KNOW  
IT'S A STEADY FLAME THAT GROWS.

BOY

FEED THE FIRE WITH ALL THE PASSION YOU CAN SHOW.

BOTH

TONIGHT LOVE WILL ASSUME ITS PLACE.

BOY

THIS MEMORY TIME CANNOT ERASE.

BOTH

YOUR FAITH WILL LEAD LOVE WHERE IT HAS TO GO.

TELL HIM.

TELL HIM THAT THE SUN AND MOON

RISE IN HIS EYES.

REACH OUT TO HIM

AND WHISPER,

WHISPER WORDS SO SOFT AND SWEET.

BOY

HOLD HIM CLOSE TO FEEL HIS HEART BEAT.

LIBBY

LOVE WILL BE THE GIFT YOU GIVE YOURSELF.

BOTH

OOOH.

NEVER LET HIM GO.

*Music ends. BOY exits.*

LIBBY

Ladies and gentlemen, Barbra Streisand. Love. That's ultimately what we're all looking for. Erikson said, "Life doesn't make any sense without interdependence. We need each other and the sooner we learn that, the better for us all."

This next stage Erikson refers to as "Generativity vs. Stagnation" and takes place usually in mid-adulthood. It is about raising children.

*(PowerPoint image: cartoon of parents  
and kid)*

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

It's also about giving back to the community and making a difference in the world. In a way, the focus has gone from the self, to another person, and now outward even further, to the world at large.

An example of this stage from my own life involves my mom. We attended an event to raise money for Haiti after the devastating earthquake there. The women we met at the fundraiser explained that they were trying to develop a school and summer camp in Mirebalais, a town in the mountains outside of Port au Prince. Without hesitation, my mom asked to be involved and help in any way she could. The next thing ya know... we are on a flight headed to Haiti to help create a summer camp.

*(PowerPoint image: Kids in Haiti)*

It didn't matter that we didn't know any Creole or really have a specific plan. She wanted to contribute—entertaining the kids with art, music and sports. In fact, she got on the local radio station and invited any kid from age 5 to 15 to come on down. So this happened:

*(PowerPoint image: Libby being  
overrun by tons of kids)*

Now, she goes every year to help out—whether it be teaching math—

*(PowerPoint image: Mom teaching)*

*(PowerPoint image: Schoolgirls)*

—Teaching the teachers how to teach, or bringing mothers supplies for their newborns at the maternity unit in the hospital. With the help of friends from our community, she has donated a plethora of clothing, health, and school supplies to the kids and families of Mirebalais.

*(PowerPoint image: Deb dancing with little boy).*

Anyway, totally putting her on the spot. But this is prime example of what this stage is about: giving back to the world in a meaningful way.

*(PowerPoint image: Mom with kids)*

And now the final stage. The “old person” stage. *(Noticing the image of Mom is still on screen)*  
Sorry, Mom! You’re not there yet.

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

Rather than “Old Person” stage, let’s call this the “Wisdom” stage. The time when an individual accept the life one has lived and is able to reflect on it. In this stage, passing on stories and guidance to previous generations is key.

*(PowerPoint image: Rosenfield generations)*

It doesn’t mean your life is over, it just means that you look back more than you look forward.

*(PowerPoint image: cartoon of older man)*

And you ask questions: Was it worth it? Was it fulfilling? What did I accomplish? What do I regret? What have I learned?

*(PowerPoint image: blank)*

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

Erikson said that every adult, whether he is a follower or a leader, whether he's a member of the crowd or an elite, every single adult on the planet...was once a child. He or she was once small. And it reminds us that we're always changing and growing, moving from innocence to awareness, from ignorance to knowing. And trying to pass on our lessons from one generation to the next, as we all move from stage to stage to stage.

Thank you all for joining me this evening. I would love to take this moment in thanking the incredible Garrett Martin and Kira Robbins for so graciously taking this on amidst their crazy schedules. And thanks to Raymond and Susan for their fearless guidance. Thank you to Austin for inspiring the Beautiful Child choreography and Maggie for filming it.

And lastly, I want to give unlimited gratitude to my mother for letting me brag about her. And more than that, for the love, nurture and everything else that she and my dad have given me over the years. It's made me into the person I am today.

In the spirit of honoring those who came before us, I'd like to ask my mother to join me in tonight's final song.

(PowerPoint image: Stages of Life)

*Music begins: "The Circle Game"*

YESTERDAY, A CHILD CAME OUT TO WONDER,  
CAUGHT A DRAGONFLY INSIDE A JAR,  
FEARFUL WHEN THE SKY WAS FULL OF THUNDER,  
AND TEARFUL AT THE FALLING OF A STAR.

AND THE SEASONS, THEY GO ROUND AND ROUND  
AND THE PAINTED PONIES GO UP AND DOWN.  
WE'RE CAPTIVE ON THE CAROUSEL OF TIME.  
WE CAN'T RETURN, WE CAN ONLY LOOK  
BEHIND FROM WHERE WE CAME.  
AND GO ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND  
IN THE CIRCLE GAME.

THEN THE CHILD MOVES TEN TIMES ROUND THE SEASONS,  
SKATED OVER TEN CLEAR FROZEN STREAMS.  
WORDS LIKE "WHEN YOU'RE OLDER" MUST APPEASE HIM  
AND PROMISES OF "SOMEDAY" MAKE HIS DREAMS.

AND THE SEASONS, THEY GO ROUND AND ROUND  
AND THE PAINTED PONIES GO UP AND DOWN.

WE'RE CAPTIVE ON THE CAROUSEL OF TIME.

WE CAN'T RETURN, WE CAN ONLY LOOK

BEHIND FROM WHERE WE CAME.

AND GO ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND

IN THE CIRCLE GAME.

SIXTEEN SPRINGS AND SIXTEEN SUMMERS GONE NOW.

CARTWHEELS TURN TO CAR WHEELS THROUGH THE TOWN.

AND THEY TELL HIM,

“TAKE YOUR TIME, IT WON'T BE LONG NOW

'TIL YOU DRAG YOUR FEET TO SLOW THE CIRCLES DOWN.”

AND THE SEASONS, THEY GO ROUND AND ROUND

AND THE PAINTED PONIES GO UP AND DOWN.

WE'RE CAPTIVE ON THE CAROUSEL OF TIME.

WE CAN'T RETURN, WE CAN ONLY LOOK

BEHIND FROM WHERE WE CAME.

AND GO ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND

IN THE CIRCLE GAME.

SO THE YEARS SPIN BY AND NOW THE BOY IS TWENTY

THOUGH HIS DREAMS HAVE LOST

SOME GRANDEUR COMING TRUE.

THERE'LL BE NEW DREAMS, MAYBE BETTER DREAMS,

AND PLENTY

BEFORE THE LAST REVOLVING YEAR IS THROUGH.

Sing with me!

AND THE SEASONS, THEY GO ROUND AND ROUND  
AND THE PAINTED PONIES GO UP AND DOWN.  
WE'RE CAPTIVE ON THE CAROUSEL OF TIME.  
WE CAN'T RETURN, WE CAN ONLY LOOK  
BEHIND FROM WHERE WE CAME.  
AND GO ROUND AND ROUND AND ROUND  
IN THE CIRCLE GAME.

*Music ends.*

*LIBBY bows and lights fade*

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New England Conservatory (music theory, diction, chamber music, voice, opera, piano), Longy School of Music (a capella, choir), Penn State Schreyer Honors College London Study Tour (theatre), British-American Drama Academy (Shakespeare in Oxford/Yale), New York Conservatory for Dramatic Arts (acting on camera), Stagedoor Manor (musical theatre), Boston Ballet (dance)

**Academic and Professional performance experience:**

*The Light in the Piazza, Falsettoland, Big River, Gypsy, O Beautiful, Hair, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum, Love in Hate Nation (new work), Radioactive (new work), Something Wicked (new work), Love and Other Fables (new work)*

**Community service involvement:**

Four summers of volunteer service in Mirebalais, Haiti, co-founding a summer camp and instructing arts & crafts, athletics, dance, music; Drumlin Farms Nature Camp; Making Strides Against Breast Cancer

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