

The Hot Seat



Elizabeth Reaser

The *Twilight* star drops the vamp act to tackle real-life horrors. By **Sarah Bruning**

You're starring in the play, *How I Learned to Drive*, which deals with some pretty serious topics, including pedophilia. What kind of research did you do to prepare?

I was really trying to explore the time period, the place. I did a play in London years ago called *Blackbird* [in which the character] had been abused by her father, so I have books on that subject. Also, the news: There's so much when you go online. But truthfully, to me, this is more of a love story than anything else. It illuminates something horrific and devastating, but it's also a love story.

In what way?

The characters have forged a connection that they probably won't have anywhere else for the rest of their lives. What [Uncle Peck, played by Leo Norbert Butz] does is very wrong, and there is no excuse, but [the playwright, Paula Vogel,] doesn't judge her characters. My head is just spinning from the experience. For me to comment on abuse would be disrespectful to people who have actually had it happen.

How did you learn to drive?

I was a natural. When we were like 10 or 11, my friends and I would steal our parents' cars in the middle of the night and take them out. We were out in the country in Michigan; we would just joyride and hope and pray we wouldn't get caught.

Did your parents ever find out?

I actually didn't get my license right away because I did get caught when I was, like, 15. I stole my dad's girlfriend's car and got into an accident. No one got hurt, thank

God, but I got super busted and couldn't get my license right away because I was on probation.

Are you a good driver?

If you asked me that five years ago I would've said yes, but I think now, I'm not. I'm scared. I do like it if I'm somewhere far away, [because] it kind of reminds me of being home in Michigan. But for the most part no. That's one of the reasons why I love New York: I don't want to drive.

You're based in L.A. now. How does New York compare?

In L.A. I could just not leave the house for a week and a half. New York feels more like home to me because I lived here for so long, and I went to school here [at Juilliard]. I love being on the street, because I'm such a weird, shy person, so it forces me to be out in the world.

What's the weirdest exercise they had you do in your Juilliard classes?

We had to do this object work in our first year, which is very basic. You could be taking a shower and have water on you, for example. This guy started doing cunnilingus [Laughs], like he was going down on a woman. Nobody could quite figure it out for a while. But it was one of those moments where our teacher—this 80-year-old, genius, brilliant, famous acting teacher—and the class all put it together at the same time, and it was so inappropriate and crazy. It's not like I'm a prude or not into exploring sexuality; it was just so bizarre.

How I Learned to Drive opens at Second Stage Theatre Mon 13.

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