

# From the Roof to the Final Frontier

## *Actor's Passion was Built on the HEHS Stage*



Story by Patrick J. DeGeorge

March 3, 2023

When Todd Stashwick was in junior high, he attended a Hoffman Estates High School production of *The Music Man* because his sister Dana was part of the backstage crew. The visit inspired him.

“I was like, ‘That what I want to do in high school,’” Stashwick said. “After that, I auditioned for and was cast in the musical ‘*Oliver*.’ That pretty much lit the fireworks. I just kept doing it.”

He’s done it all the way to a dream gig on the final frontier: the Hoffman Estates graduate is now acting in *Star Trek Picard* as Captain Liam Shaw, commanding officer of the U.S.S. Titan NCC 80102-A.



*Stashwick in the HEHS Production of Fiddler on the Roof (from the 1986 Halcyon)*

It’s the latest of about 130 different roles he’s held, most of them a mix of comedy and science fiction. Over the course of his career, Stashwick, a self-proclaimed “nerd boy from the 80s,” has had several “pinch-me moments,” including roles such as Bela Lugo’s Dracula in *Supernatural*, *The Black Mask* in *Gotham*, and a Romulan spy on *Star Trek*.

“Getting to stand on Vulcan with my pointed ears holding my lirpa was thrilling,” he said. “It’s like ‘you’re standing on a set, but this is official. This isn’t cosplay.’”

He credits the Hoffman theater program for his journey.

In high school, he appeared onstage every year for school productions, ranging from *Taming of the Shrew* and *The Sound of Music* to *The Matchmaker* and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. In the midst of his resume-building stage credits, Hoffman musical director and English teacher Kathy Wandro – his primary influence within theater -- approached him as a junior with an idea

he has never forgotten.

“She had an idea for me, but it would require me to take choir,” he said. “That turned out to me being cast as the lead in Fiddler on the Roof my senior year.”

It was then that he started auditioning for college theater programs.

“Those four years at Hoffman fortified me and set my boat into the waters of a professional career as an actor,” he said, noting he had a supportive network of staff and family in high school.

“I was focused on art, but what spurred my soul was acting and theater,” he said. “Kathy [Wandro] really fanned those flames. I also had very, very supportive parents who were thrilled when I found something that made my heart sing.”

The network was so supportive that if Stashwick would fall behind in homework, Wandro would encourage him to get caught up so he could continue to pursue his passion.

Stashwick got his theater degree from Illinois State University, and went on to follow in the footsteps of his hero Bill Murray – performing with Chicago’s Second City before moving to New York.

He landed roles in shows like Law and Order in the late ‘90s and later moved to Los Angeles, where his first role was as a demon in Angel.

For students considering a similar career path, Stashwick suggested additional training in spots that allow you to fail and learn in the process. That, he says, helps you grow.

He added that students should know what type of roles they want to pursue.

“Know whose job you want to replace,” he said. “Let that guide your decisions. Learn and see what turns you on as an actor. No one just jumps off the bus in the middle of Ohio, walk into a doctor’s office and says they want to be a doctor. The same thing applies with acting. Get training.”



*Stashwick at the Star Trek Picard premier (submitted photo)*