I have stage fright.

That familiar, slightly sweaty feeling crept up on me last week as I sat in a bank of black metal chairs at Cleveland Public Theatre.

And it wasn't even me on the stage. It was Courtney Brown, an actress pretending to be me. I was watching rehearsals for *Johanna: Facing Forward*, which previews on May 28th and opens May 29th.

The play, written and directed by Tlaloc Rivas, is based on a 2007 Plain Dealer series I worked on with Johanna Orozco in the months after she was raped and shot in the face by her ex-boyfriend, Juan Ruiz.

The eight stories chronicled Johanna’s recovery from life-altering trauma. It hinged on the wisdom and courage of an 18-year-old to choose forgiveness over hate. She chose to move forward with her life - instead of allowing it to be swallowed up by anger and resentment.

If you missed the series or want to read it again, you can catch up with it here. (We've also added some new photos to the original package.)

Working on the story with photographer Gus Chan was the most intense journalistic experience I've ever had. I developed a bond with Johanna that continues to this day.
Johanna taught me lessons about resilience that I've tried to carry with me in both my personal and professional life. When I first saw her lying in bed at MetroHealth Medical Center, she was unable to speak, yet was unwilling to be silenced.

But I never expected to see her story - and our relationship - recreated under the hot stage lights.

And it still feels kind of weird.

Rachel Dissell
Journalist, The Plain Dealer reporter and Pulitzer Prize-winning author of 9-part series "Facing Forward"

To read Rachel’s full article "How a reporter became a character in a play" click link.

Johanna: Facing Forward by playwright/director Tlaloc Rivas is based on the writings of Johanna Orozco and Rachel Dissell's Pulitzer prize-winning series Facing Forward, originally published in the The Plain Dealer in 2007. Click Here to read the full 9-part series and more, and to learn how Johanna's story - and her tireless advocacy and activism - led to the approval of critical legislation aimed to protect teens in abusive relationships.

Johanna in The Plain Dealer...

Johanna: Facing Forward - Multimedia
An interactive, clickable audio and photographic presentation of events, from the emergency room to the trial, narrated by Johanna Orozco and her Cleveland Clinic surgeon Dr. Michael
Fritz.

A Look Back at Johanna Orozco
A slideshow of the original Plain Dealer articles and photographs.

Johanna Orozco raises her arms in relief as she poses outside the Justice Center after ex-boyfriend Juan Ruiz pled guilty to charges. (Gus Chan/The Plain Dealer)

In Johanna's Words...
Excerpts from Johanna Orozco's journal entries and poems.
Johanna Orozco: Where is she now?
A slideshow of Johanna and her family from July 2014.

Poem by Johanna Orozco, 2005

My heart opened up to you
And let you in
I've given you everything I had
And let you touch my skin
I wrote your name deep in my heart
And I promised you that
We will never part
You invited me in your home
And I did the same
We build a connection and together
We lit a flame

Johanna Orozco-Fraser smiles as she watches her son, Malcolm play in the backyard of her godparents’ house July 25, 2014. (Gus Chan / The Plain Dealer)
Johanna: Facing Forward

Written and Directed by Tlaloc Rivas

May 28th - June 13th
7:30pm, Gordon Square Theatre
Tickets are $12 - $28

Inspired by the true story of Johanna Orozco, a Cleveland teen who survived a gunshot wound to the face by her boyfriend in 2007 and whose story sparked a nation-wide movement against teen domestic violence. Based on the Pulitzer prize-winning series "Facing Forward" by Plain Dealer journalist Rachel Dissell, Johanna: Facing Forward is a vivid recount of the young woman's extraordinary journey of courage and recovery. Produced in conjunction with Teatro Publico de Cleveland. World Premiere.

Featuring Tania Benites (as Johanna), Becky Aviles, Andrea Belser, Courtney Brown, Arthur Chu, Jason Estremera, Stuart Hoffman, Leticia Lopez, Gilberto Peña, Alejandro Rivera and Blanca Salva

Megan Monaghan Rivas- Dramaturg
Aaron Benson- Scenic Designer
Inda Blatch-Geib- Costume Designer
T. Paul Lowry- Video Designer
Sam Fisher- Sound Designer
Michael Cunningham- Lighting Designer
Kevin Orozco- Board Operator
Sarah Lynne Nicholas- Stage Manager

A World Premiere...
Actors Jason Estremera (as Juan Ruiz), Tania Benites (as Johanna Orozco). Photo by Steve Wagner.
Actors Tania Benites (as Johanna), Courtney Brown (as Rachel Dissell). Photo by Steve Wagner.
Johanna Orozco-Fraser and
Johanna: Facing Forward actress Tania Benites
meet for the first time
Thank you to our Johanna: Facing Forward partner...

Lutheran Hospital
a Cleveland Clinic hospital
Show and ticket info:

All performances take place at Cleveland Public Theatre, Gordon Square Theatre 6415 Detroit Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44102.


Shows are Thurs/Fri/Sat/Mon at 7:30pm. Thursday and Monday shows are just $12!

For tickets and show information, call the CPT Box Office at 216-631-2727 x501 or visit www.cptonline.org.

FREE BEER FRIDAY is every Friday at CPT. Audience members are invited to mingle with artists after the show and enjoy a drink on CPT!

Want to see the complete 14/15 season at-a-glance?
Visit www.cptonline.org for up-to-date information on all of our upcoming productions!