**In 140 characters or less, tell us what makes you unique. \***

An actor, int'l teacher, clown, gardener, painter, bbq-pitmaster, baseball fanatic, former nanny, and "hungover swing man" on bball-court.

**Why are you applying to the Flatiron School? \***

The Flatiron school will be the perfect launching pad to a profession that will make me happy. Learning to code on my own for the past few months, I have been presented with brand new challenges that I am not accustomed to, have been inspired to be innovative and have been forced to think creatively.

I admire Flatiron’s ability to teach coding as an art. Five years ago, the thought of learning to be a programmer never would have crossed my mind. I went to acting school at NYU; we didn’t have ‘computer’ class; we had voice, movement and diction. There was constant reflection on what choices were successful and what didn’t work. Ultimately, these classes taught me the value of a ‘problem’. Problems teach me how things work, they can expand my imagination, force me to take a stand and say, “here is MY idea for how to fix this.” As an artist, you must creatively enjoy creatively solving problems.

I know any career I settle into will need to have the room for me to be creative. I will always approach whatever I do as an artist. This is what attracts me to programming.

I saw first hand how the Flatiron school helped my roommate, Josh Rowley, to grow as a friend and professional. I also saw how much dedication it took on his part. And I can see how he still hasn’t stopped learning new things since. After speaking with Josh, he warned me of programming’s struggles and obstacles, the need for resilience when learning, and the persistence to keep going. I decided to give it a go and started working on the Flatiron School’s pre-work. I dove right in, and hardly came up for a breath.

First, I took a course on how to build an HTML/CSS site from scratch. This gave me the impetus to design my own website, “dodgerredhead.nyc”, that would function as a place I could share cool things about the volunteer work I have been doing with Zara Aina, an NGO. As I built the website, it became apparent to me how programming really is a creative expression. Similar to acting, programming requires you to use your whole mind like a puzzle does, visualize large complex problems and break them down into smaller tasks.

I moved onto the Git, GitHub, Ruby, and Rails sections in the Flatiron Prework. The ideas started popping up for how to improve my project. I began to make it a web application. I started to learn how to configure gems and generate migrations. Each idea led to new things to learn and new problems to solve. I am now hooked.

I have challenged myself to learn about programming on my own and I still want to learn so much more. I want to go to the Flatiron School to be challenged creatively, to be a part of a supportive community, and to be happy.

**Tell us about your professional/educational career to date. What are you up to now and how did you end up there? \***

I grew up in Pasadena, CA and moved to New York City in 2006 to attend NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. I graduated in 2010 with a BFA in Acting and a minor in African studies.  I studied in the Meisner Extension, part of NYU Tisch’s rigorous studio program. The ideology centers around one principle: to build your character through detail by asking questions and trying to be as specific as possible. Break down every aspect of the problem at hand and find out as much as you can about it.

After graduating from NYU, I have been lucky enough to be a part of some amazing projects.

My volunteer work with Zara Aina, an international NGO, took me to Madagascar as part of a team that developed theater programming intended to engage at-risk Malagasy children. The children selected to be a part of the program were aged 10-14 years old and are prone to abuse, panhandling and homelessness. My work with Zara Aina helps to motivate these children to achieve more and invest in their sense of possibility.

As the nanny of two 10 year olds in Brooklyn, I found the delicate balance of being a playmate and a role model. I could be silly and play games, but also inspire the kids to dream up awesome projects like woodcarving, building a Go-Kart from scratch, or remodeling a road bike.

And using what I had learned about art, farming and carpentry from my experiences in Africa, I transformed the backyard of my Crown Heights brownstone into an urban-garden. Digging up the Kudzu-infested soil and filling it with a slew of heirloom tomatoes, tomatillos, and mammoth sunflowers; scouring the streets of Brooklyn for the perfect wooden pallets to recycle into a table, bench and vertical planters full of lush greens.

In the fall of 2014, I started working for a grocery delivery tech start up, Good Eggs, as a member of their operations team. I was attracted to the company because of their mission to build and sustain local food systems. I realized that what I really wanted was to be a part of the team that was building the applications that Good Eggs ran on. I began studying the code that the companies systems relied on and this sparked my interest in being a web developer. Good Eggs laid me off in February 2015 when the company eliminated 20% of their workforce in one day. After initially feeling disappointment, I took it as a blessing in disguise and have since been on a mission to be a web developer.

**The ability to think in a structured way, both creatively and quantitatively, to solve complex problems is an important element of being a successful developer. Can you tell us anything that demonstrates your abilities in that realm? (anything from standardized test scores to experience playing a musical instrument counts) \***

In 2014, I traveled to Madagascar as a volunteer teacher with Zara Aina, an NGO that does theater programming with children who are prone to panahandling, homelessness, and are victims of abuse. The theater programming I helped to create inspired our students to be confident learners who are better prepared to participate actively in their education, community, and social lives. From thinking creatively to collaborating with others, theater helps to motivate the students to achieve more and invest in their sense of possibility. My work with one of the students, Andreas, exemplifies how I was able to turn one student’s complex problem into a learning experience.

First, to bring the theater program to life, it required each member of the Zara Aina team to happily wear many hats, show some serious hustle, and hold frequent rehearsals to develop our programming. Since Zara Aina’s inception in 2012, I have volunteered to take on many unique challenges like applying for 501C3 tax exemptions, meeting with UNICEF officials at the Malagasy embassy in New York to solicit funding, and arranging the silent auction for our Benefit Show.

The work we did on our 2014 summer trip to Antananarivo started with the students choosing a Malagasy folktale to turn into a play. At the end of the rehearsal process there would be three shows, highlighted by a performance in front of over 5,000 people at UNICEF’S “30 Years in Madagascar” celebration.

A short time into the program, I noticed that the work wasn’t affecting Andreas like it was with most of the other students. Andreas was super shy on stage and he would always get in fights with the other kids off-stage to distract from rehearsal.

After speaking with some of the Malagasy teachers, it turned out the other students were teasing Andreas because his mom was a drug addict. While all of the students who participate in Zara Aina needed tons of love and care, I realized that Andreas required extra compassion and patience.

I had to figure out a way to inspire Andreas to be more participative in rehearsal. The success of the workshop hinged on the ability of the instructors to build a trust between Andreas and themselves.

It was a difficult conversation to have, but I knew I had to be a role model and find a way to encourage Andreas to be more involved in Zara Aina’s programming. I took Andreas aside and let him know that he shouldn’t have to suffer from teasing and told him that he was one of the bravest actors I had ever seen.

After sticking up for Andreas, his attitude seemed to transform. He started coming by the house in the mornings before rehearsal to play dominos and cards. He was much more expressive and involved in rehearsals. His relationship with his friends improved and he hardly got into physical confrontations anymore.

One night, while cleaning up the house after rehearsal we noticed that two of our Ipods had gone missing. After turning the house upside down, we realized that one of the students had probably taken them. The students were over at the house constantly and we would often let them use our electronics to play games or take pictures.

The next day at rehearsal we called the ensemble together and let them know the situation, “nobody can come over to the house until the electronics are returned.”

The students went into an uproar. They hated the idea of not being able to come over to hang out. They all started to point their fingers, “ANDREAS!”

It hurt to think Andreas could have done it. My first reaction was to punish him. None of the students had ever taken anything from the house, but it seemed that the temptation had at last proven to be too much. It would have been easy to give up on Andreas and see him as just a thief. After all, most of his friends had already dropped out of school to steal or beg, why would Andreas be different?

But, I thought about the forgiveness my parents and teachers had shown me when I had done something just as wrong as a child. Why should Andreas’ ethnicity, class, or nationality decide that he couldn’t have the benefit of the doubt like I did?

Andreas stealing the Ipods had become an ambiguous problem with no clear solution, but I knew I had to turn it into a learning moment that could help the student grow. I took Andreas aside and said, “I understand people make mistakes. I used to get into a lot of trouble at school too. All I care about is that you bring the best version of yourself to rehearsal tomorrow. ”

The next morning Andreas returned the Ipods. This is an example of the trust that Zara Aina’s work helps to build between the instructors and the students. This trust helps to make Zara Aina a transformational program.

For the rest of the workshop, Andreas was a model student. He became the star of his scene and would come to rehearsals with lots of ideas.

After performing for over 5,000 people at UNICEF’S “30 Years in Madagascar” celebration, Andreas had a smile on his face that stretched from ear to ear. Andreas expressed to me that in the beginning he felt small and as if he had nothing to offer, but as a result of the time spent working with the company he felt “big” and recognized the gifts that he possesses. Moreover, I could tell that there was an eagerness to continue sharing those gifts with others.

Working to organize a multi-national, educational-theater NGO is an extremely complicated process that required a kick-ass team to show some serious hustle. Ultimately, it was each team member’s ability to break down a huge puzzle into smaller tasks that allowed me to be a positive influence on a kid like Andreas. My experiences working to inspire Malagasy students have prepared me to not be intimidated by any problem.