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STUDENT'S FIRST SCRIPT WINS NATIONAL AWARD

For Ali Pavuk, a student at the Performing Arts Academy (PAA) of the Ocean County Vocational Technical School (OCVTS), a poster hanging on the wall in her classroom changed her life. The poster that caught her attention advertised a contest, the 25th Annual Playwright Discovery contest, sponsored by the VSA arts, an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, that combined two of Ali's greatest passions, acting and writing. The theme of the script had to focus on people with disabilities. Although she had never written a play before, this sixteen year old student high school decided to take on the challenge.

Ali's first thoughts that were most contest entries would focus on the downside of disabilities so she chose a comedic approach to the subject to be different.

She began the writing process by developing two main characters. Evan has dyslexia, extreme to the point that he cannot read or write. Evan's co-worker, Julia suffers from anxiety. When the two realize they like one another, they each choose to hide their disabilities from the other. Their attempts to cover the difficulties they encounter create several lighthearted moments throughout the play.

A few of Ali's friends have dyslexia so she knew something about the difficulties of the disorder. She spent time researching anxiety disorders in order to add realism to her script.

After two months of writing and painstaking editing, Ali submitted her play "For the Love of Goldfish", to the judges. "The most difficult part was cutting things out in order to make the 40 page limit", commented Ali.

When asked the significance of the play's title Ali said, "The title was the last thing, even as I was ready to seal the script in the envelope. I started with some word association, just listing words from different parts of the play. Love and goldfish seemed to stand out so I put them together."

In June Ali received a telephone call that changed her life. She found out that her play was chosen as the winning entry from hundreds of scripts received from across the nation. She learned that her play would be performed by a professional cast at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC

Ali then worked hand-in-hand with Director Paul Douglas. "I have been totally involved in the production process" as far as stage adaptations and changes.

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Ali and her family traveled to Washington DC for the scheduled performances on September 29. She also received an award and a check for \$2000., at a special ceremony prior to the evening performance.

“I’m still shocked. It’s been months since I found out I had won and I still can’t believe it. I’m really excited to see the play on stage.”

Ali is a junior at the Performing Arts Academy where she studies acting as part of integral college preparatory curriculum. The Performing Arts Academy Is a four-year public high school administered by the OCVTS district. The school is designed to provide performing arts curriculum focused in dance, vocal music, and acting, along with a rigorous college preparatory academic program for students living in Ocean County who are gifted in the performing arts. The teaching philosophy strives to incorporate the arts into all educational areas by integrating curriculum and by interaction with professionals from the arts industry.

When asked if this award has influenced her plans for the future Ali said, “I’m not sure yet what I want to do in the future, but I have started writing another play.” We’ll have to wait and see if this one too will have a storybook ending.

VSA arts , an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, is an international nonprofit organization founded promote a society where people with disabilities learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. For more information about the Playwright Discovery contest and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts visit www.kennedy-center.org.

For more information about the OCVTS Performing Arts Academy visit www.ocvts.org.