

# Nathan Alan Davis



**"E**verywhere." That's where playwright Nathan Alan Davis seeks creative inspiration. He says, "I look to what's going on around me, my own family. How do they think? . . . What do they care about?"

Nathan's passion for writing and theater was ignited in middle school, when he helped write a script, design costumes and sets, and act in a version of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. He went on to earn a degree in acting from the University of Illinois. After performing with theater companies, he got a master's degree in playwriting from Indiana University. He's now studying at the prestigious Juilliard School in New York City. One of his plays, *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea*, has played in several theaters across the U.S., and it won an award from the American Theatre Critics Association. Nathan lives with his wife, Liz, and their three daughters in New York.

**Q: What's your favorite childhood memory?**

A: Just being by myself and making up stories in my mind . . . giving a toy a voice and a sort of character, and just having all the time in the world to myself to do that.

**Q: What was the most challenging experience for you when you were a kid, and how did you handle it?**

A: The hardest thing for me as a kid was wanting to be perfect, wanting to do everything right . . . I would feel guilty, or I would feel sad if I wasn't able to do [things] . . . what I thought was perfectly . . . If you're sort of a perfectionist, it also means that you have high standards . . . And so I think that it's not necessarily a bad thing. It's just a challenge if you have that sort of personality.



Left: Nathan, age 9, with his sister, Bahiyyih, and parents, Sharon and George, in Rockford, Illinois.

Right: Nathan, age 10, loved creating stories and characters as a kid.

**Q: How did your parents encourage you in your career?**

A: They are both artists themselves. My father is an actor, and my mother is a writer and a mime . . . They made it very clear that they wanted me to do . . . whatever path of service seemed right for me . . . It takes a lot of emotional vulnerability to be an artist. And so you do have to have support, a support network. And my family is definitely that for me . . . Not only artists need that. Every person needs that.

**Q: You're at Juilliard, a world famous university, in a program that only accepts four or five writers yearly. What was being accepted like?**

A: It was really, really great . . . also a little scary, because [we] had to move to New York City . . . As exciting as it was to get in, that wears off really quickly, because then you have work to do . . . It's made me . . . realize just how . . . beautiful but also how difficult life is . . . There's no one solution . . . other than [to] keep doing your work, and keep serving and keep growing.



Questions and

Answers with an

Inspirational Bahá'í



Above: The cast of *Dontrell, Who Kissed the Sea* performed in Washington, D.C., in June 2014.



Left: Nathan gets creative inspiration from his wife, Liz, and their three daughters, Olivia, Eleanor, and Elsie.

**Q: What advice do you have for kids who want to be writers?**

A: Read a lot of different things . . . Being able to take in different kinds of stories and understand different cultures and . . . people is really important. I think the more you read, the better you'll eventually be able to write . . . Just having fun and letting your imagination take you wherever it wants to go.

**Q: What are important life skills for kids to have today?**

A: One . . . is perseverance . . . the ability to work through difficulty, because that's going to happen . . . Empathy is extremely important. And it's especially important for writers, because you have to be able to understand where different people are coming from . . . And then . . . a sense of humor.

**Q: This issue of *Brilliant Star* is about finding our life's purpose. Do you have any thoughts about ways to find your purpose?**

A: I think you find your purpose by what you love. So I think you have to listen to your heart and listen to what are those things that make you feel really happy or the things that make you feel really sad. You know, if it's something that really bothers you, whether it's about the world or about the way somebody treats somebody else . . . [it] could be part of your purpose . . . to find a way to rectify that . . .

**Q: You note that your African and Western heritage are both essential to your work as a playwright. How so?**

A: When you're a writer, who you are as a person . . . is your main source of material. And so you have to . . . embrace who you are. And I would say that being mixed race and living in America, I have often felt maybe a little bit like I'm on the outside looking in . . . People wouldn't know how to categorize me . . . This can be difficult, because sometimes you don't feel like you fit in or you don't feel like you belong. But it can also be really great, because in the end, no person fits into a category . . . In some ways, it's an advantage . . . to be different . . . It makes you question the way things are.

**Q: If you had one wish for *Brilliant Star's* readers, what would it be?**

A: The biggest thing that I wish for is courage . . . Being a kid is not easy, and sometimes people overlook how hard it can be. You need the courage to stand up for yourself and . . . whatever challenges you have in front of you.