

# Jodi Baker

“I think you should try everything. Even if you do think you’ve found your major, you have to be open to different suggestions.”

**JODI L. BAKER**  
Sophomore



Sophomore theatre major Jodi Baker had planned to attend Cornell University in New York, but that was before she had experienced the California sun. “I always thought I would be a lawyer because that’s a very practical thing to do,” she says. She applied to Cornell and other universities in her home state of New York, but when her mother and stepfather, Dr. Corrinne Hales and Dr. John Hales, came to CSU, Fresno to teach English, Jodi followed. “I figured I’d fly back to New York and go to school there, but I kept putting it off. I really liked the weather out here,” she says.

Baker initially planned to attend CSU, Fresno for only one semester. She remained, but her interest in law did not. “I took an acting class just for fun,” Baker says. “I thought I would be concentrating on political science.” Instead, the class meant a new career. “I started giving all my attention to Introduction to Acting (Theatre Arts 32),” she says. “I became very interested, and pretty soon I realized that this was what I really wanted to do.”

Baker, who is 19 years old, has pursued this new interest passionately from small parts in CSU, Fresno productions “Butley” and “Telethon Fool” (Fresno State’s entry in the American College Theatre competition) to a leading role in Tennessee Williams’s “The Glass Menagerie.” Baker

was nominated for the prestigious Irene Ryan Award for her performance as the withdrawn, painfully shy Laura. “I think that in five years I would play Laura quite differently,” says Baker of the complex role, which requires portraying a person whose physical handicap represents a deeper disability — an emotional one. Brad Myers, assistant professor of theatre and director of “The Glass Menagerie,” says of Baker, “There’s a quality about Jodi that you cannot teach. She’s special. Having acted in several major roles in her freshman and sophomore years at CSU, Fresno is quite a significant accomplishment. Jodi is intuitive, sensitive, and what is most impressive — disciplined. When seeing Jodi on stage, the audience wants to like her and be with her. She exhibits an innate compassion that draws an audience toward her.” Baker found that the many opportunities she has had as a freshman and sophomore at CSU, Fresno have not been routine. “There are some programs [at other universities] in which students are not allowed to be in any production until their third or fourth year,” says Baker. “Fresno State isn’t like that. Here, there is always the opportunity for on-stage experience, and that’s great for a beginning actor.”

Last summer, Baker was an apprentice with Western Stage, a regional theatre company in Salinas, California. Baker appeared in “West Side Story,” “Chorus Line,” and “Wheels” (a children’s musical). She also worked on production aspects such as stage construction, lighting, and costuming. The apprenticeship also gave her a glimpse of professional theatre life. “I know I want to act more than anything

right now, but later I might want to direct or stage manage, and it’s good to learn some of that now.”

Baker is pleased with the way her university education is turning out. Says Baker, “High school is a very strict environment. College is more open. I don’t think it matters as much what your goals are at first; you just need to take in as much knowledge as you can about everything. Then once you’ve found your specific goal, you can incorporate everything you have learned into that. The political science classes that I took may help me with an acting project sometime. Everything relates, I think.”

## Is being a theatre major what you expected?

I think it requires a very different personal time schedule and a different lifestyle from other majors. It’s a whole different kind of work. The people are different and the atmosphere is different and the homework is different. You have to go home and memorize a scene while others may be memorizing mathematic formulas. The classes are very hard. A lot of people think, “I’ll take an acting class because it will be easy; I won’t have any homework.” But you have to bring all of yourself to every class. You can’t ever tune out like you might do in some classes. Often there isn’t a textbook, and you have to be there every class, and also make yourself very vulnerable to criticism. It takes a lot of commitment, especially during your college years when you’re taking other classes simultaneously.