

KEITH COLLINS

is a model, actor and promotional event planner. He has modeled for the national advertising campaigns of major designers like Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein. As an actor, he has appeared on *Sex and the City* and *The Guiding Light*, and will soon be in VH-1's *Games People Play*.



TSA: Your work introduces you to a lot of interesting and famous people. Please tell us a little about your career.

Keith: I started out as a model and I had a pretty big modeling career with my Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein ads appearing in national magazines. Then I went to acting school. My party-planning business—red carpet events, movie premieres—aided my acting career. I was doing people's parties and they gave me acting jobs. It all snowballed. Now I still do some modeling, but I'd much rather go on acting auditions.

TSA: Where do you see your future?

Keith: I would say in event planning and acting, too. My business has led to so many different things. But if my acting really took off I'd pursue it—like my starring role in *Games People Play* on VH-1. I was cast in the weekly show after being in the movie of the same name. I play a guy with TS.

I want to try to do as much acting as possible. It's very important to me. I want to do a lot of educating. I'm in the public eye and in the gossip columns. I'm starting to get a lot of heat and I want to get the word out to educate people about TS.

TSA: TS is in the media frequently, what do you think of the way it's presented?

Keith: When you mention it to people, they think of swearing. Only eight to ten percent of people with TS have the swearing symptom (coprolalia). It's ridiculous that it's the only thing they know about TS.

TSA: The impact of TS varies from person to person. What do you think the effect has been on your life?

Keith: To be honest, it was the biggest nightmare and the most positive influence. It was very hard growing up—it was truly bad. Now I'm able to control a lot of things

in public. TS has opened my eyes and made me a better person. I wouldn't get rid of it.

TSA: When and how were you diagnosed?

Keith: I was a kid, six or seven years old. My parents were getting a divorce and I started having twitches and tics. The doctor said that maybe it was brought out by the divorce—that I'd been traumatized by the rough divorce and the fighting between my parents. There was a lot of fighting. Maybe the stress exacerbated my symptoms? It was going to come out but maybe it came out then because of what was happening.

TSA: What did your family do?

Keith: It wasn't until later on in life that they really discussed it with me. I was never babied and always encouraged to try things. I didn't notice any kind of special treatment, which is a good thing. I've spoken to some parents who worry about a child going out on auditions and the fear that the child might have tics and get laughed at. I say the only way to conquer it is to do it. Maybe you'll be made fun of the first 100 times and at the 101st audition you get the part and you are the happiest person. You can't be sheltered or treated differently. My mother is an amazing and compassionate woman but she didn't give me pity.

TSA: What about school?

Keith: It was horrible until I got started in sports. I was a very, very good baseball and basketball player. I made the all-star teams. Being really good at sports helped. When I was about 16 I started lifting weights and began competitive bodybuilding at 18. I won some competitions too and was qualified to go to the nationals from New Jersey. I did this all drug-free, which is why I had to stop at 20. There was nowhere for me to go at that point (as a drug-free competitive body-builder).

Bodybuilding gave me a lot of discipline and motivation. It's not a team sport—you get out of it what you put in. You are in control. It's all about discipline and diet and it got me very focused. When I was twenty, I was discovered for modeling.

TSA: Stress has a big impact on people with TS. Do you do anything to help alleviate it?

Keith: I go to the gym. I go four or five times a week. It relieves stress and you really feel relaxed after.

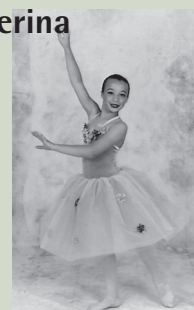
TSA: Any advice for kids with TS?

Keith: You are cool. You are different. TS will make you a unique and better person. You won't see that until later in life. So shrug it off, keep doing the things you want to do.

Be open about it. Don't hide it. Be positive about it—say I have it and nothing is going to stop me. It's going to make me different and better.

The Ballerina

You may recognize Aungeni Saxon from the HBO documentary, *I Have Tourette's but Tourette's Doesn't Have Me*, but she also stars on stage. Aungeni just won a coveted scholarship to the Ballet Met Academy.



Aungeni is now nine years old and has been dancing since she was six. Although everyone raves about her gift for dance, this talented young lady doesn't aspire to become a prima ballerina, but wants to be a doctor when she grows up. Until then, though, it's pirouettes and toe shoes for her.

A Scholar, Athlete, and School President

Meet Josh Wurtzel, the Student Body President of Plainview/Old Bethpage JFK High School in New York. In addition to being an honor roll scholar, Josh is also captain of the varsity winter track team and a starter on the varsity baseball team.



If You Are Moving . . . or are receiving duplicate copies of this Newsletter— please let us know so that we can update our mailing list. To update, we need both your old and new addresses.

