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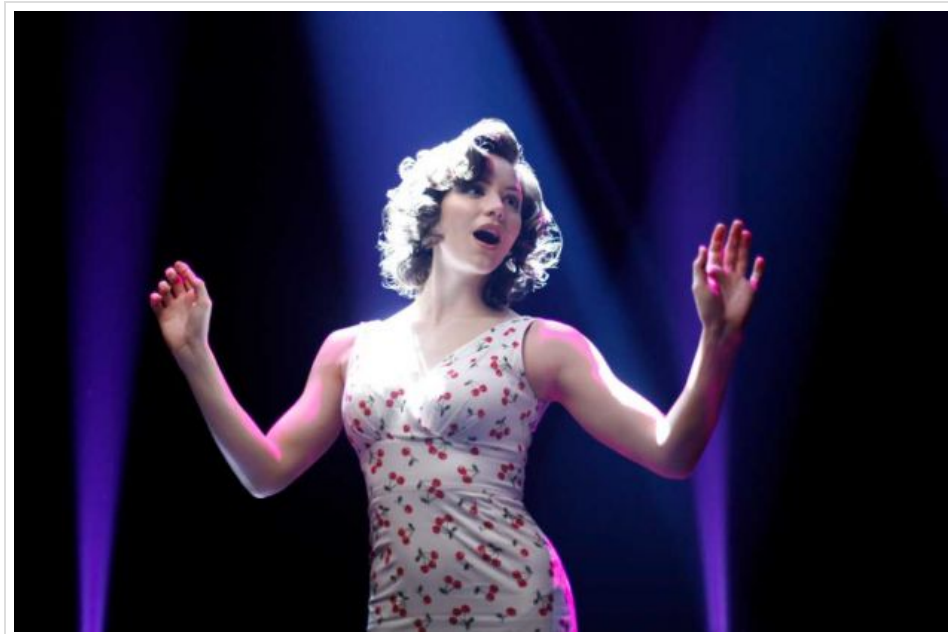
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I Gave Up My Dream, And I'd Do It Again

2 years ago by Allison Ford | 15 Comments | Share a Tip |



For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be an actress.

I knew—*knew*—that performing was my destiny. I spent my childhood being ferried to and from lessons, shows, and auditions. I studied. I practiced. I got into a top college program, excelled in it, and then embarked on my sure-to-be legendary career on Broadway. It was the only thing I had ever really wanted.

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10 Celebrities Who Change Their Hair Too Often For Us To Keep Track

by Taboola

And then I quit.

Some might say I gave up on my dreams, and it's true, I did. At twenty-six, I put away my songbook and haven't sung a note since. But the funny thing about dreams is that, sometimes, they don't lead you to where you thought they would.

I saw where my dream was leading me. I had romanticized la vie boheme that I was sure to have as a struggling Manhattan artist, but the more I worked (and I did work, both on stage and on camera), the more I grew to hate it. I hated the casting directors who barely looked at me during my auditions. I hated my agent for submitting me for parts that I had no hope of booking. I hated other actors who could only blabber about new classes, new headshots, and how Landmark Forum had really taken them to the next level.

I looked twenty years down the road and saw myself tending bar into my forties, living alone and never having had the chance to settle down and find a partner or have a family. I knew many older actresses who had gone down that path, and some loved their picaresque lives without ties or burdens. But for others, it was a fate they were resigned to, continuing to pursue stardom not because it was what they really wanted, but because they didn't know what else to do. I didn't want to be one of them.

It's a sad fact of life that not all dreams end in glory. Sometimes they just don't pan out. Sometimes dreams end in bitter frustration, the dreamer wondering what might have been if they'd had the courage to find another path. How many of us know someone who attended medical school or business school, quickly realized that it wasn't right for them, but trudged on anyway because it was their dream to be a doctor or a banker? At that point, blindly following a dream becomes less about pursuing a passion and more about just desperately trying to avoid failure. There's nothing authentic or satisfying about that. In fact, continuing to chase something that's long since stopped making you happy can make you pretty miserable.

But here's another funny thing about dreams: Even the ones that don't work out can lead you to new places and new dreams that are better than you could have ever imagined. If I hadn't followed my theatrical passions to New York, I might never have temped for months, with hours free to peruse the internet and write. I might never have known that it was possible to make a living by slinging words on the web. Without my background in entertainment, I might not have been able to get my first regular writing gig—as a theater and film critic. It was only by pursuing one dream—and then giving it up—that I was able to find a new, better one.

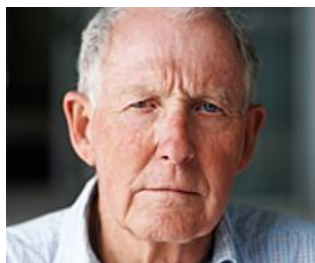
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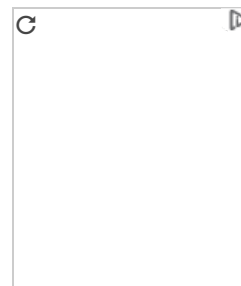
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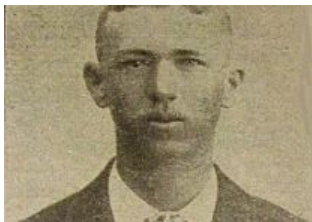
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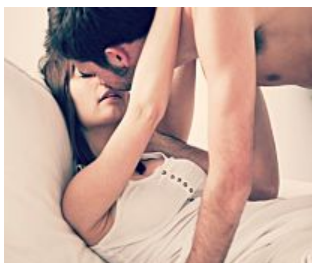


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Copine • 2 years ago
I love this article! Replace actress with architect and you've got my life. I'm so glad i decided quit and pick a new mayor and just start something new. Most people think i gave up on my dream but i didn't, it just wasn't the right dream for me. I'm glad i'm not the only one who thinks of it this way.

Samantha_Escobar • 2 years ago
This is a beautifully written article and I'm so glad you wrote it. I sang opera from ages 11 to 20 (I'm 22 now) and I loved it...for the first half of that time. Then I realized that being competitive and singing in front of people was something I hated; that having a panic attack every single intermission of every performance was not just "jitters." I switched to doing makeup for film and, voila! Way more happy (until I gave up that dream a month ago because, again, I wasn't happy).

I think having several goals and dreams throughout life is okay. I wanted to be a ninja until I was nine because of Jackie Chan movies. Does that mean I gave up my dreams because I never took karate? Hell nah.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ex-Rockette · 2 years ago

I seriously cannot tell you how much this article means to me. I am also a musical theater actress and a writer. Luckily, I've been able to pursue my dreams simultaneously until this point, but I've recently realized that the frustrating world of theater has been less and less fulfilling. Even so, I'm having a hard time letting it go. Your writing has put things in perspective for me. Thank you.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Arielle · 2 years ago

I love your story. I'm a 25 year old actor, and have finally gotten to the point where I'm making my living off of what I love to do. The one thing I hate about the job is that even when I am working, I fear that I may not book another job. After working for over a year straight in various productions, I don't know what my next job will be after July 1st. I also really want to start a family with my partner in the next few years. I thought about what I could be happy doing other than acting, and so this summer I'm training to be a yoga instructor. I was really nervous telling my parents and my partner about this, but they've been nothing but encouraging and feel this is a great move. Ideally I'll be able to act and teach yoga, but since the world works in surprising ways, I know I'll be happy if I'm able to, at least, do one. If I ever do stop acting, I don't want it to be me giving up on my dream, I want it to be me discovering a new one. It's all about what makes us happy.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Raero · 2 years ago

I love this. One of my most incredible moments in life was the realization that I was just as happy performing in local theatre productions (in New Orleans, LA) than I was at a professional level. I realized that what I love is theatre, not fame, and that I can have a truly fulfilling life making my money doing something more stable and pursuing my passion without the pressure of making it my "living".

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Raero → Raero · 2 years ago

@NotThumper, you totally should! The atmosphere is so much more FUN. At some of the Equity auditions you still run into a few of the I'M A REAL TRUFAX ACTOR!!! types, but they're few and far between.

I'm sure I'll have to cut it back when we do have kids, but it really does help fulfill that creative imperative that won't go away, no matter how many websites I design. :)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



NotThumper → Raero · 2 years ago

THIS.

I have often thought that someday I might get back into it, get back into community theater. Once my daughter is a bit older and it could really just be a hobby, no pressure.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



MaddyJay · 2 years ago

MFA in Acting. Now I teach Math to Adults. And I'm the happiest girl in the world. Haven't been to an audition in 3 years. I proudly tell people I'm a recovered actress. Some of my actor friends tell me I'll "come back to it someday", or worse, they fear I've "given up" and it's like this sad and whisper-worthy thing. It's hard to explain that I

gave up, and it's like the sad and miserable thing, it's hard to explain that I loved it, but, all of a sudden, it just didn't seem all that important to me. So I found something that was.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ktcan10 · 2 years ago

Thanks for the article, it's nice to know that there are others out there like me. :) I started out pursuing my dreams in technical theatre, got an advanced degree, and then did a complete 180 and ended up in emergency medical services. I took a lot of heat for the change at first; people thought I should stick with what I started. But fortunately, I have some pretty amazing friends and family, and now that they see how happy I am moving forward in my new career, they're nothing but supportive.

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NotThumper · 2 years ago

I had the same dream you had...and I also gave it up. I hated the politics of it all. Some people get cast for all the wrong reasons, none of which are actual talent I might add and I hated it. I started acting and singing because it was fun. Yes, it was hard work, lots of time and dedication but it was also fun and it made me happy. When it stopped being fun and I noticed I was no longer happy I knew it was time to say goodbye. It's a chapter of my life that I adored, and miss occasionally, but one I am ultimately glad I closed.

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Kristen · 9 months ago

I love this! I am actually about to leave LA because I have had the same realization as you. I never wanted to have to say that I gave up, but now that the time for me to head home and start a new journey is coming closer, I am excited to see what's next in my journey.. <http://loveyourbeautifulife1...>

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Gabby · 10 months ago

This blog is so inspiring and beautifully written!! I wish I had seen it a year ago when it was first posted. Our stories are so similar! I started out as a child stage actress and actually made a living at acting and singing until I was 24. Then, while in college, I discovered that I loved Physics! Then I discovered science writing! Then I took on parenting! Then I rediscovered acting (did that again for seven more years)! Then I discovered Technical Communication! Life is meant to be seized, embraced, and experienced to the fullest! How wonderful of you to give honor to your other skills and abilities! Goodness - Leonardo da Vinci was an artist, sculpture, musician, mathematician, a writer and more! No one ever pegged him as someone who gave up!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



JB · 2 years ago

Hey you can still make youtube videos :). Thank god for youtube :) Everyone including movies are all moving online anyways. Just a thought :)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



allison · 2 years ago

This is my story, too. I gave up trying to make a career out of performing, but I continued singing just for the love of it. The first place I sang after giving up professionally? Carnegie Hall. I think sometimes dreams do come true, just not always the way you expected them to.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



porkchop · 2 years ago

I don't think that's what people mean when they ask if you have regrets--I mean, I can't get in their heads any more than you can, but if it were me, I would be asking because I'd be so curious about what your life was like, and I would just want to hear about it. I

would also be impressed by your commitment (childhood through age 26 is a long time), and I would wonder if you'd found the grass really wasn't greener, and that the conventional life was too boring.

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