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Debra Rosman


January 4, 2023 | 4 MIN READ

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Author and actress Debra Rosman

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It was a modest check, but the memo line said it all.

It was for \$125, and it was made out to me—for an acting job!

So what, you might be saying. A lot of people are actors. But please allow me to share my story. I hope it encourages you to assess your own life and helps you clarify if you are living it authentically or not, and why that even matters.

Back in 1991, I returned to school: Edgewood College, in Madison, WI, where I majored in the communication arts and sciences, which loosely translated into acting. When I completed the course work, at the ripe old age of 34, I was told in no uncertain terms, “You are too old for *ingénue*!” Harsh? Yes it was. Still, I tried in vain to find acting jobs. Eventually I caved and listened to everyone around me who said that I needed to get a real job. I joined the ranks of corporate America.

Until recently, that is. At the tender age of 60, I quit my secure day job. Now I’m leveraging my retirement funds to pursue my dream of acting. Having recently

done some volunteer theater, one of my castmates gave me tips on how to apply for acting jobs in my area. Through BackStage.com, an online platform that connects actors with auditions and roles, I landed a improvisational comedy gig at a murder mystery dinner theater in the Chicago area.

My first official acting job. And a check!

It's been a long time coming. Many children play make believe when they're growing up. If my mother was alive today for you to ask her, she'd tell you that I did it *all of the time*. Once, Mom allowed me to use an entire roll of aluminum foil for the purpose of creating my crown and scepter, which I used in order to pretend to be Miss America. We had just watched a 1960s broadcast on television, and I spent hours walking up and down the runway (my parent's hallway) wearing one of my sister's prom gowns while smiling and waving to my adoring crowd. I still feel like I won.

Deb Rosman in a college production, before she gave up her dream for a corporate career.

And in the middle of one particularly scorching summer, I dressed up in one of my great grandmother's old black fur coats, donned a winter scarf snug around my waist, and put my mom's black velvet poodle skirt on my head to create a habit. I was pretending to be a nun. We weren't Catholic. But when my grandma drove in and saw me wandering in the garden she promptly asked mom, "Why is there a nun here?" Success!

The point is, I've always loved nothing more than entertaining. It's just who I am. This is my authentic self, which I denied for over 30 years. I constantly had to dial back my personality in order to comply with my workplaces, and many times I suffered in silence. I was always desperately trying to figure out a way to escape my lot in life.

Recently, becoming more focused on solutions instead of problems, I came up with a way to move forward. During my 20+ years spent in the energy commodities trading space, I'd built up a decent brokerage account that I've been periodically drawing upon. Now that I'm 62, I will review and consider taking Social Security early—and yes, I am well aware that would lock in the lowest monthly amount. However, if I live well into my late 80s or 90s, which my genetic code implies, I could make out on that.

You see, I intend to earn more money in my retirement years than I have to date. Thanks to living

authentically, I'm looking forward to continued work, and because I love what I do, it's like never working another day. There's also an old 401(k) combined with working various temp jobs that afford me flexibility. (Admittedly I'm less thrilled about temp work, but I no longer fear becoming stuck there.) I'll continue to piecemeal acting gigs and speaking engagements together. Does all of this sound crazy? Awesome? Doable?

Today I'm partnered with an up-and-coming playwright, Kelly Burr, and we are following my college mentor Jewell Fitzgerald's advice: "If the theater you want doesn't exist, create your own!" We're putting together a theater group where all are safe from prejudices found in the real world—in my case, ageism. Our goal is to create a utopia for all of the underserved talent out there. I absolutely love every moment of every day because I am no longer willing to dampen my light nor rein in my passions for the illusionary sake of security.

This bold move isn't for the faint of heart. But with the right financial plan in place, could a version of it be right for you?

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