

I remember being asked “What do you want to be when you grow up?” and having no idea how to answer. So my whole life path has been about finding the answer(s) to that question, which has led to many different starts and restarts, widely different destinations and reasons for going there. If I have learned anything along this path, it is that even as you may put forward your best effort for success in reaching your destination, you may end up somewhere else other than where you thought you were going. For me, the labyrinthic road to finding purpose in what you do has not ended. At age 70, I have unretired to start a new job that represents a purpose that has probably been hibernating in me for decades. Have I discovered finally what I really wanted to be when I grew up?

Like most people who seek, as my grandmother used to say, to make something of themselves, I didn't really have a smooth road. My childhood was not atypical for the modern dysfunctional family. Working musician-alcoholic and mostly absentee father, Hyper-critical secretary mom who thought all young women should just learn to type so they could support themselves no matter what. That said, the “road” wasn't really rocky. There just wasn't a road, period. In an effort to pave one for myself, I sifted through lot of odd and seemingly unrelated jobs after college, all of which somehow paved the way and kept me connected to music. While I had been a flute player and a pretty good singer for most of my young adult life, that ability started to diminish in the early 2000's when I developed a chronic cough and found myself out of breath after walking up the steps to the Met Museum. Well, anyone who's been there knows there are a lot of steps, but to be out of breath when you get to the front door? That was a little strange.

Of course I shrugged it off and blamed my fatigue on the 90 degree plus weather. Fast forward to the summer of 2012 when my husband drove me to the hospital after I collapsed on my computer keyboard. Diagnosis: Pneumonia. Surgery: Left Lung thoracotomy. Yikes, but that surgeon saved my life. After escaping from the hospital, I continued my nature walks, but the walks became shorter and I got tired sooner. By 2014 I no longer could produce the tone I wanted on the flute because I simply didn't have the air. No problem. Just an opportunity to do something different. So, I learned to play the cello. Yeah, you still need to breathe, but you don't need to share your air with the strings. As for singing, I chose my repertoire carefully—transposing songs to a lower key when possible, and favoring songs that featured humorous, rhythmic lyrics with lots of instrumental riffs where you could catch a breath as opposed to long legato melodies that required lyric virtuosity. If you encounter a bump in the route, you take a detour and can still end up in the place you were going anyway, or maybe even a better place!

Jump blues and the music that came before rock n roll have always been a subject of fascination and joy for me. Happy, but still mindful music; lyrics that are contagious and a beat that will get you through the toughest hurdles of your professional life. It's been the starting point for a lot of original music, stories, essays, and my personal culture. I vacuum better to a jump blues tune. When I was teaching classroom music to a zoo of middle schoolers, I found that a lot of the pre-rock n roll era music actually got the kids to sit in their seats and listen—for a change. It was a survival tool for me even though I ultimately switched genres to become a professional actor. During that stint of 10 plus years I co-supported myself with non-creative jobs that still made every day feel like an audition. I lived to work—mostly just to prove I could learn and do anything I put my mind to, and at the very least learn something beyond typing 60 wpm as my mother had always encouraged me to do. Low aspirations were not my thing. Jump blues became the catalyst for making a difference in these routine jobs, even if only in small ways. Looking back, I remember humming a Louis Prima song 'I painted it blue' at the end of one of those day jobs. My mood went from feeling defeated to being exhilarated. The song was all I needed to change my view of the world and myself. I later wrote my own arrangement of it and performed it live for a crowd of strangers at a corporate event. For the 3 1/2 minute duration of the song, people stopped their shop and small talk and listened in silence, broken only by a few authentic chuckles and audible smiles. Humor and music are a powerful combo. And Jump blues in particular was my recipe for making something new again. I guess the ability to turn a negative into a positive through music has become what sets me apart from many others who may have followed a similar "dead-end" path but never tried painting it a different color.

Taking a risk could be stepping anywhere outside your comfort zone. And sometimes the risk can actually be in your comfort zone, at least that has been my experience. I remember commuting across New York State every Friday night for three years. I left my office at 5 pm and drove for six hours to my "Painted Lady" two story dream house in Jamestown NY. My dream was to open the first interactive children's museum in that part of New York State. And the dream lived in that house. The 6 hour drive was just part of my routine and definitely inside my comfort zone. But one wintry night the weather was sending all the signs that should have told me this was a drive I didn't need to make. I was halfway there and drove into what could only be described as a case of white out gone rogue. The night sky was completely starless and the wind and snow were gusting nonstop. And although I probably should have called off that weekend at the museum, the next day was the opening of a special exhibit that was too important to cancel. So I drove and drove and then I hit the invisible ice patch. It was that whole life flashing before your

eyes moment as my car spun in mid air before plunging headfirst into a ravine. It (and I) landed perfectly intact and without a scratch! Fortunately I'm not a compulsive gambler, so my risk-taking adventures after that were always before dark and blizzard free.