

The Joys and Frustration of an Involuntary Passion

Summer 2004, I'm a young sixteen year old lad, growing up in a small town just outside Liverpool, getting ready for my GCSEs and figuring out what I wanted to do as a career. Except, I already knew that I wanted to be an actor, there was never a doubt in my mind. However, being from Widnes, I was constantly reminded that this was a pipe dream, or as I was told by many at the time 'unrealistic'. I remember the reaction of my school's career advisor when I opened up about my ambition; their almost instant revulsion and insistence that it wasn't a realistic aim and I should consider going into retail or catering. It was simply incomprehensible that I might continue into further education to find out more about the craft. This was the first experience I had of the resistance that every artist, performer or any form of producer has to experience everyday in their professional life.

With the overwhelming doubt that comes pursuing arts, I do sometimes wonder why it is that some of us continue plugging away. I say that because a lot of people do seem to give up on their passion, they do walk away and, to be fair to them, they seem happy for it, relieved almost! They seem to find a way to do what is right for them and move on. That is until, after a few beers, you get into a conversation with them about "the life" and you begin to see just how huge a sacrifice it was for them to walk away and, often, something that they regret. But when the question comes, you can only answer honestly. What is more important? The luxury of stability or the freedom of creativity.

For me, us artists are constantly looking back to why we chose the difficult path and what it does for us. My desire was sparked when I was seven years old and I never looked back. I was a nervous boy with low self-esteem and I really struggled to be confident in myself. Then, my sister who was thirteen at the time, dragged me to the younger class of a youth theatre she went to and, suddenly, my eyes were open. In this community, I finally felt accepted by people (other than my family), all the quips and jokes at my expense that would normally break me were bouncing off. I felt fearless, it was the closest I have ever felt to being untouchable. As I'm writing this, I notice now that I was (excuse the cornyness of this, indulge me, I am an actor) complete. My work completes me, it makes me who I am.

In my experience, many people can tell you their moment of inspiration, when they realised what they wanted to do in adult life. But, perhaps, the feeling that we get

from this passion is different. It sparks something else, a desire to share that feeling with others, to give them the elation and the ecstasy we received from that very first moment of being an artist. The only way we do that, is actually performing or producing the work and seeing the reaction it gets. My joy as an actor comes from knowing that when I am on stage or on screen, I am releasing people from the constraints of the outside world for an hour or two and taking them on a journey. I love making them forget about the worries they have in their life and replacing these anxieties with laughter because I am being a fool on stage, or making them weep because of a touching moment that has ignited something within them. The work becomes a medicine to the overwhelming pressure of living in our crazy society. That, for me, is exactly giving an audience a taste of what it feels for me being an actor. I know that all the different artists out there have their own take on what it feels like and find their way to convey that to an audience in their work.

But, sadly what we do is not deemed as important in our current political climate and yet, without it the world would, undoubtedly, be an even tougher place to live in. So, we grind along this road of life told of our importance but not shown it. We are also in a world which decides for us what a successful artist is and isn't. The countless times I have been told by people who aren't actors that I should just go on Coronation Street, like it is that easy or even the answer to all my career choices. A lot of artists give up because we get consumed by the pursuit of success, and the pressure of reaching goals by a certain age or time. It is a journey at the end of the day and like it or not we won't be fully happy until we get to our final destination (although this is sometimes not where we originally set out to end up). Whether it's performing regularly, becoming a well known actor, teaching, producing, whatever it is, we often can never fully walk away because there is success in persistence and the fire always burns. I definitely feel like walking away a lot of the time, but through constantly poking away at this passion I have performed around the UK in venues that some of the greats have performed in, I am known by some well known artists and I am now getting to perform shows in London, which I know, would have been deemed absolutely ludicrous and impossible by the career advisor at my school in 2004. I do also believe I am close to finding my creative home, especially being part of Precarious Theatre. Here I am getting the opportunities of creating work that I can deem as my own by writing and producing as well as performing. There is light at the end of my very emotionally draining choice of life and there has been great joy in the journey towards it.

I guess what I want to finish on is a request: if you have a love or passion for the arts, don't walk away from it completely. You've got to keep it somewhere in your life. Once it's become a part of you, you need to satisfy it one way or another, otherwise you will always wonder what if and maybe regret that you didn't give it one last push. Exclude the outside world trying to tell you what success is. You know what success

is for you, so do that, do it with pride, keep at it and find that home. I say this because I know so many friends and family that have done the artist's life like this and the relief they have now is far greater than the relief in ones who gave up. I would also like to point out I am not saying DON'T WALK AWAY!!!!, because some people do have to, but rather, be open to the fact you may return to it, because it's impossible to not want to. When it all comes down to it, the freedom of creativity is more desirable than the luxury of stability to us artists. But perhaps you can, eventually, have both of these things in your life. It just depends how much you want it and how long you are willing to keep trying to find it? Either way the artist can and will always find their route, one way or another.

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