



29 Jobs and a Million Lies

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Chapter 1

New Chapter

Jobs and Lies

Satisfaction. Now there's a loaded word. People search their entire lives for satisfaction in their jobs, love lives, families, sports teams. We set goals, we come close to meeting them; and instead of feeling satisfied, we want more.

I could ruminate about how we all seek satisfaction in everything we do and that's the bread of life and it's what makes us human and not Neanderthals, and yadda yadda yadda. But what happens when a generation of young people is caught in the crosshairs of a social transformation, when some of the values we learned are no longer applicable or possible? How do we measure our achievements? This is my story about seeking satisfaction, and tripping along clumsily.

You could call it what you want, Generation X, Y or Z, or selfish ingrates who don't have any respect, or the overeducated TV generation, or the materialistic little bastards. But we are a generation of people whose parents got married, started a lifelong job, bought a house (within a reasonable commuting distance to the city), and lived there for 40 years until they retired with their pensions and moved to Miami. Well here's where things change: we don't have pensions anymore, houses are unaffordable unless they come on wheels and are temporarily located in rural Oklahoma, companies don't advertise or encourage lifelong employment, Jim X and Jane X majored in Anthropology and Comparative Literature instead of Business, took a year off after college because they were told there were no jobs in the early 1990s so they backpacked through Kenya, then still couldn't find jobs when they returned so they rented a cheap, roach-laden apartment on Avenue C and got robbed of the few dollars they earned waiting tables and selling string on the street.

I speak for a lot of people around my age when I say, we blazed another path because the baby-boomers enabled us to. Sure, many of us

fucked up that opportunity, big time. But now, in our new freedom, it is up to us to decide what satisfies us. What makes me happy? What makes me happy and doesn't give my parents a heart attack? The evolution of Gordon-Gekko- cum-subprime-securitizers-investment-bank-risk-taker-quants valued greed over loyalty, enabling downsizing and the empowerment of Human Resources departments to eliminate cradle-to-grave career tracks. Maybe some of our choices to major in fruitcake educations in the proverbial basketweaving major at college earned us few job skills, but we now have the opportunity to know how to think — some of us take that opportunity and go a little nutty with it, others decide that they'd like the comfort and security of the path closest to our predecessor's generation. Bottom line is that we have all had to adapt to the new environment — unfamiliar to our parents — by innovation, entrepreneurialism, and just plain resourcefulness in eking out livings.

I welcome the challenge of an unstructured future. Bring it on, I once thought, I prepared for anything. By the time I reached high school, my peers and I planned to start our own businesses (although we missed the dot-com boom; that was for our younger siblings, they're screwed now, too). We'll make ends meet, we'll try as many things that make us happy and earn us the satisfaction we're seeking. And when we're done being happy with that line of work, we will do something else. We are smart. We are educated. We are ready and willing.

* * *

No one I knew was on track for a career that could afford them a mortgage, marriage and a secure future by their late '20s. Many of us made choices to learn as much about everything as we could, so that if anything came along we could jump in. But because we took the opportunity to use college as an education rather than training in a vocation, our interest in and our skills to tabulate numbers or sell intangibles was nil. Why bother, when we knew there were no jobs anyway? My little clan in college was drawn to film. We actually studied film, in a frighteningly serious way. Making movies became a fundamental way of life. It offered a creative interpretation of the medium that imitated life, and a presumably interesting way to earn a living in the future. Movies weren't reality and you could do whatever you want as a filmmaker. Or so we imagined.

My story probably isn't too unlike yours. Hopefully your story isn't as haphazardly ridiculous, but I know you've tried some interesting career paths, ones that your family expressed skepticism about, and then you

changed your path, maybe you changed it a few times. You wanted to be a lawyer in high school; you own a coffee house now. You studied to become a nurse; you are a travel agent now. You were an absolutely radiant actor when you were younger; you work at an investment bank now. You started out in physical therapy; you write copy for an ad agency now.

* * *

I found myself explaining to a friend with whom I had lost touch for several years after college that I have had 29 jobs.

"Wow, Jenn, so what have you been up to for the past ten years? It's so weird to catch up," said my old buddy, Jeff, from Indiana, when he came to visit me on the beach in New Jersey.

"Yeah, that's a funny question. Seems like I've had 29 different jobs, with all the random things I've tried," I half-joked.

Jeff, not the most stable of my old friends, laughed at what we both thought at the time was a pathetic attempt at sarcasm. But in that few seconds or so, I actually went over in my head how many jobs I had had and decided to count right then and there.

"Dude, seriously, I think I've had 29 jobs," I said, challenging myself to the count.

"Right. You're out of college not even 10 years. No way," he said.

"Here we go," I said as I began to recount each job.

* * *

I even count some of those unpaid internships, as well, because they are jobs, and unpaid work (or, *real life try-outs*) didn't exist a generation ago. Internships, by the by, are crap, and it makes me vomit to think that I voluntarily engaged in seeking them out.

Jeff challenged me to actually come up with the legitimate number.

"I'm not going to include *every* job because some jobs just aren't stupid enough to include in this context. What I mean to say is that although I was a French tutor for about a month or so in college to a retarded Chinese boy, it really isn't worth discussing. I'm also not including the first paying job I ever had, besides babysitting, out of high school as a file clerk at a law firm. Frankly, I can't even remember that summer because it was so boring. Actually, my whole life at that point was boring, so the \$6.00 per hour job was no specific highlight," I said, coolly, already thinking about how many jobs I've had — and why.

So you've probably guessed it, this book is not about jobs. Finding satisfaction in a hostile environment? I wish I could say that it is about searching for identities, or a journey through the 1990s in your 20s, or an exploration into the gender-biased social conditioning of blah blah blah. I faced myself as I documented these stories, and was able to look at this part of my life through a perspective that only time and experience can expose well enough in order to derive comedy from it. I think we all look back on some of our decisions and admit they were stupid, especially when we were young. I still can't believe some of the absurdities that I put myself through despite the very evident obstacles that lie ahead. I am not saying that I shouldn't have engaged in some of the endeavors that I did because of obstructions or challenges, I just wish that I could have seen the absurdity more clearly. Who knows.

* * *

I think that in order to take any risks in life, you have to suspend disbelief — of your own decision-making ability — just to make that leap. Don't we all create our own realities through our own perceptions? Only years after do I now see the ultimate absurdity of some of the choices I've made. Oh come on, you've lied to yourself and probably even to your own shrink plenty of times: about that person that you're convinced loves you back, or that job that will pay off in the end, or that you aren't *that* fat, or that your hair really does look good that way.

We all have a selective way of listening and retelling the "truth." We retain the things that we want to retain, and we reject the rest. That's how our social fabric doesn't come apart, because we are all totally insane freaks who have the most bizarre routines, quirks, fantasies, fetishes, perspectives, and opinions. If we weren't all totally different, life would be a George Orwell story. That's why each of us creates our own alternative universe to find satisfaction. Actually, no, happiness isn't really the motivating factor here... I'm a realist, so the underlying impetus to create the alternative universe — the ultimate lie — is so we can think that we are actually in control of our own destiny.

Here's a close look at mine.

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Chapter 1

The Beginning

The summer of 1991 commenced my foray in the film industry in New York. In fact, in retrospect, majoring in film in college was silly, but I will make that an unofficial sidebar in this book because it will, once again, prove my parents correct when they told me that changing my major from political science to film studies was stupid. Although I should admit that one of the internships proved valuable as it led to a real job after I graduated... at \$250 a week, it barely counts as a real job; but I showed up there every day for a year and a half and got a payroll check from that. Stupid, like I said.

I grew up in a middle class suburb of New York in a great house with great folks. My mom, although she didn't have full time jobs as I grew up, was always busy running around doing something.

"Mom, I'm really sick. I don't want to go to school today," I'd say to her.

"Ok, then, but I won't be here," she would say and return to my bedroom with a thermos filled with apple juice, some toast and cough medicine, before heading out to Bloomingdale's for the day. Or my mother would substitute teach, or work at the travel agency or the real estate office.

She was always late picking my little brother or me up from school activities, parties, whatever. Kind of a spaz, but awesome in her own rebel way. Mom never 'played the game' and marches to her own drumbeat.

My dad was one of those cradle-to-gravers, devoting 38 years of his life to IBM — the big blue. He was a rebel, though, I could tell early on. I think that although he retired very successful from the company, he spent many years telling people to fuck off in his own way. He took few risks career-wise though, having grown up lucky to have heat and food in his immigrant mother's basement apartment in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. I could say that my dad's work ethic and values permeated my approach to life, but I think that what resonated more with me was his ability to play the game and still maintain his own agenda. He spent years avoiding the consistent moving encouraged to young executives at the company, foregoing title and status for stability and security for us. The payoff was a 3 year stint at the Paris office when I was about to enter high school, so our whole family moved to Paris. We would often sit

around the dinner table and pontificate about what it would be like to live in Paris, or other exotic cities.

"We would eat out every night," my mom would say.

"We would vacation as often as possible," my dad would say.

And one day, the best conversation happened.

"You know all those times we talked about moving to Paris?" Dad asked us. "Well, we're going!"

And the eating out every night and the vacations as much as possible actually happened for three straight years.

I spent my formative years hanging out at the Louvre, in the Latin Quarter at the bars and cafes, and ran around on the weekends on the trains, having late-night parties under the Eiffel Tower and in the parks around the city, and the American Embassy (friends whose parents had access to the U.S. Embassy PX enabled me to eat Twinkies year-round, and not just on home-leaves back to the U.S.).

I was glad to have moved out of La-La-Land suburbia. I may have been the only 13 year old girl to be happy to get the hell out of her surroundings. See, I had no friends. I was a strange kid, I guess. Kind of a screwed up little suburb, and I didn't fit in so well to the form and structure expected of these kids, which wasn't the worst thing in the world. I left nothing behind in New Rochelle, New York, except for a life that a certain section of well-off society already had carved out for me, provided I would conform and not ask any questions.

"Jenn, what's up with that weird t-shirt you're wearing?" I would hear all the time, when I wore torn or hand-painted t-shirts. "Why are you wearing locks on your pants? What's wrong with you?" I would hear from the insecure pack of wolves masquerading as 8th grade girls. My own fault, I suppose, for inviting comments because I guess I just didn't want to fit in. It does seem weird though, in retrospect, to have worn locks on the belt loops of my Lee jeans.

So once we moved away, I learned early to have a detached identity. I had to learn to adapt on-the-fly, whenever and wherever necessary. If I had any trepidation about climbing mountains in the south of France with a bunch of kids who didn't speak one common language, or about being comfortable surrounded by sketchy, swarthy, dirty men on crowded metros in Paris, I would have been in way big trouble. Maybe it was this attribute of jumping right into things without worrying about long term consequences that has characterized the pattern of jetting from job to job seeking; or, well, I still don't know what I've been seeking...

Or maybe it was the notion that since my upbringing provided so many means of satisfaction — derived only from hard work and a bit of struggle — that anything in the world could be mine. Knowing I can accomplish anything is empowering; yet it is terrifyingly intimidating because I set such lofty goals and high expectations for myself and for the world around me. That's where the intrepid notion of satisfaction can become destructive instead of, well, satisfying.

Chapter 2

New Chapter

Summer of 1991, Internships

After I moved back to the States and decided to go to Indiana for college, I had already begun to pretend that I was in control of my destiny evidenced by the ease of changing paths by changing majors. I learned that after a couple of unpaid jobs working as a coffee-fetcher and cable-carrier on instructional videos, changing my major had nothing to do with reality outside my pretend universe. Neither position was obtained by working hard, or by the coursework I chose, and being recognized out of these merits was irrelevant. It was through friends of my parents. The first internship was working as a, uh, well, there's no job description for an intern working on the set of instructional video production. Lifting boxes, moving cables, taking shit, holding stuff, standing around, waiting mostly, and usually getting yelled at. The most exciting part of this experience was that the video was about caulking. No, really, I fully learned how to caulk. I am a caulking master now, I can caulk up and down, and I have the experience to prove it... and it was on my resume for years.

"Hey, whatever your name is, bring the box of whaddyacallits over to the grip and get the thing from him for me," was one request I specifically remember receiving.

"Um, which one—" I would ask hesitantly, as I stared at an entire trailer full of boxes overflowing with whaddyacallits.

"Are you stupid? That one over there," was the response I got from a bent-over, fat, mean guy who didn't point anywhere.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I'm an idiot. And I'm blind, while we're at it. So kindly instruct me on what it is you really need" I said back to him, without the nervous laughter that at least would have buffered the situation.

This instructional video was the first thing I could put on my resume as "work" experience. Stupid, GOD THIS WAS SO STUPID; though I

don't know at what point I realized how stupid it was — then, or now. Who on earth would possibly care? How naive was I to think that anyone could possibly care that I moved boxes during the filming of a caulking video? I'll tell you who: all those people who took those film classes with me, who went home to their Indiana towns that summer and didn't *work in the industry for experience*. Instead, they made money waiting tables at Western Sizzler, enough to buy a car and be able to drive around Bloomington. But I had it set: no money and no car, but I had industry experience.

Sidebar: I did own a car. My parents bought me a 1985 Buick LeSabre to drive to my waitressing job in between internships, it was awesome. They're so cool. For my birthday, I even got a tape deck installed. That was July 24. Less than 3 weeks later, when my mom, my grandmother and I started to drive out to Indiana for school, the fucking thing blew up at Exit 48 on Route 80 in New Jersey, in front of the Einstein Moomjy carpet showroom. Everything got burned, the smell was disgusting. I lost my clothes, my music (which in 1990 was ALL vinyl), and whatever irrelevant crap a 19-year old takes to college. So I didn't have another car until I was 25. I was making more money at 18 waitressing in the summer to pay for the car than I did at 25 working at whatever dumb job I had then.

If I had only opened my eyes to see that some of the choices I had made were pointless and stupid, I might be a very successful and sane individual now. But then I wouldn't have any good stories to tell years down the road.

My parents' friend owned a successful industrial video production company. He was a nice guy, kind of gruff, but funny as hell. I didn't know him very well, but he was a NY Knicks fan and with that, I trusted him. His daughter was the same age as my brother and they went to school together, so I think that was the connection. You see, the community in which I grew up was a wealthy, predominantly Jewish New York City suburb. I was probably expected to, a) marry a rich lawyer; b) go to law school, myself; c) not ever run around on the set of various film and TV sets schlepping heavy boxes and pretending to be a screenwriter.

The shooting for this particular video was on location somewhere in suburbia. I made sure to *network*. I networked with the cameraman, the producer, and even the *talent*. Ha, talent, I could caulk WAY better than actors. Although, one guy made it to commercials; he did some Hoover vacuum cleaner commercials and a few others throughout the past several years. I hope, at least, he lived up to his own expectations. As

production wound to a close, I needed to fill up the rest of my summer with more substantial industry work. I knew I needed to *get my foot in the door*. I could schmooze with the best, as I learned this skill would do me absolutely NO good in my relatively short future in the film business.

The segue here is that I successfully networked my way in the door by hooking myself up as an assistant editor, logging hundreds of hours of videotape shot by a documentary film company. No, actually, that's not true. What really happened is that my parent's friend who got me the internship on the caulking video knew a wealthy, artsy-fartsy couple on the lower east side who went to Louisiana and hoped to make a movie about Zydeco with their video camera. They shot hundreds of hours of video of backwater Cajun people who didn't speak English, jabbering on about this cultural phenomenon right here in our own country. The couple actually thought that it was French that they were speaking, and that all they needed to do was get someone who could translate. Yeah, ok, I grew up in Paris, but this was no French that I knew they were speaking.

My task was to write down each scene according to the timecode on the bottom of the screen, on a bunch of editing equipment that I didn't know how to work. To make matters worse, they thought that because I could speak French, that I could somehow translate. I had the patience of a fly, and I just thought that it was gibberish from a bunch of freaks in Louisisana meant to confuse us Yankees. I spent two months pretending to know what the hell I was doing, filling dozens of yellow legal pads full of handwritten, illegible notes about my ridiculous interpretation of a language and content that I had no clue about.

But I tried not to feel bad because I wasn't being paid anyway.

Those heavy summer days in the loft space in Chinatown were interesting, though. It was in right smack in the middle of filthy and stinking and crowded Grand Street. But for me, it was like a movie set, because I didn't know anyone who really lived in a loft. This was a full-on industrial style loft space, complete with pipes across the 20 foot-high, rotted, peeling, tin ceilings, squeaky hardwood floors, huge windows caked with grime and covered with iron bars. The elevator was not people-friendly, but otherwise fun to use and extremely noisy and slow, and big enough to haul up an elephant. The rest of the building housed what seemed to me to be sweat-shops, but I dared not mention my thoughts on that matter.

That ended in kind of a fizzle, don't know what ever happened to that video, and I certainly hope that they didn't use my translation and

logging for any remotely significant purpose. I can't even remember how the engagement ended, that's how unexciting it turned out to be. Onward.

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I wonder how the world functions with so many totally useless and directionless endeavors out there. I mean, really, as much as I fully support the expression of art and the importance of caulking and Zydeco, why pretend that my role in these efforts was even vaguely relevant? I can understand if I was 12 years old, fine; you're still learning about the world, and people. But at 20? I refuse to discharge myself from the responsibility of realizing that that summer was a complete wash for all parties involved in my life; and an exercise in complete futility as far as gaining valuable experience goes. But there were plenty of grown-ups around who could have easily eliminated the prospect that I somehow thought could be a useful addition to my ostensibly growing experience in the professional realm of the film industry. Lies, all lies!

Zydeco. Please.

CHAPTER 8

- We used to kick the crack heads off the stoop when we opened the building each morning. They thought it was funny when they'd break off a needle in the lock rendering it useless. The lock that is. I'm sure they found a use for the needle.

I actually told the people at the documentary company that I had gotten some huge fancy international sales job at some huge fancy international film distribution company, based in Paris. I'm sorry I led them on, I said, but I just wasn't sure if it would come through and on and on. Well, of course I was over qualified. A half-blind cripple with lupus and a lobotomy would be over qualified. And with such a hefty background of production experience, how could I even consider beginning a career at such a low status position? If it weren't for sarcasm, I couldn't write this story.

Meanwhile, I totally hadn't found a job. In fact, I began to realize how completely impossible it was to find a job in the film industry (or any job at all, for that matter) in the summer of 1993. I'm 21, living with my folks and out of college for all of three weeks; this could conceivably be the last fun summer EVER in my life, so I should enjoy it. Here's why I didn't:

- I had no friends in New York. Or not so many.
- I was totally paranoid about not finding a job.
I can thank my father for passing on the neuroses.
- I needed to get the fuck out of my parent's house because I AM SO DAMNED INDEPENDENT.

So I scrambled and tried to get a job with Law & Order, my favorite of the previous summer's endeavors. I became good friends with one of the production assistants there (who, by the way, is still seeking success film industry in New York, 17 years later...), and hoped that something

would emerge. Well, it didn't. So I tried the horror movie film company who had used me and abused me the previous summer.

In retrospect, I suppose I realize why they were so surprised to hear from me a year after I left there as an intern. Maybe they didn't know I was gone, because I don't know if they knew I was there to begin with, or that I even left. In any event, they hired me immediately to be a casting so-and-so or a production-so-and-so for an infomercial that they were planning on producing. What? An infomercial? This is a bad, has-been, horror movie film company, home to Chopper Chicks in Zombietown, Class of Nuke 'Em High, Sgt. Kabukiman NYPD, the Toxic Avenger. What the hell were they doing producing an infomercial? What *is* an infomercial?

In any event, of course I accepted the generous offer of \$250 a week until the infomercial was complete — with no offer for a permanent job. I had as much of an idea of what to do for this thing as you do.

The two guys who owned the company and ran things (not that there was much to run) were nearly unapproachable. They shared an office with windows so caked with grime that you couldn't even recognize the view overlooking beautiful 9th Avenue in the center of Hell's Kitchen — part of the charm, you see. The office was crammed with grimy monster heads, overfilled file cabinets, stuffed movie characters, old ripped posters, broken toys, and tons of other crap about which no one had any idea. You couldn't go into the office to ask a question until at least 10:30am or 11:00am each morning because they were listening intently to Howard Stern on the radio. I soon learned that they were listening for a reference to themselves, thinking that they were still prominent in the T&A-horror-Stern-esque domain. Each time they would acquire a movie (because at the time, they weren't producing anything), they would send a stripper over to the radio station with promo materials with the hopes getting on the air; but nothing really ever came of it. Too bad for the strippers, because I'm sure they weren't being paid much, if anything, for what little exposure they were getting.

After that time, you really had to be careful as to when you approached the office because I think they started to hit the sauce; or at least one of them did. So you never knew what kind of mood you'd hit at that point. They were always so mean and grouchy and crabby and terse, that I started to do a lot of things, like sending faxes and initiating marketing stuff, or calling in talent, without asking them. Then I'd get yelled at later for not asking; or for screwing something up. The infomercial was the most ridiculous, absurd plan I had ever imagined, even for my

perverse mind. How backwards was it for a film company which hadn't produced anything in years to produce an infomercial which you had to buy on VHS that attempted to sell you their old movies, on VHS? It was a miserable failure, I'm not going to kill the surprise about this story by telling you that up front.

The first task was to staff the production. I was the staff, there was no budget to hire anyone else. Next.

The second task was to find people to be on this infomercial, and to get them to be interesting enough to make a *testimonial* about how great this company was. This was going to be interesting, since they didn't want to pay for an ad in the trade papers for a casting call. Oh, and it was going to be even more interesting since they had no intention of paying any of these people.

"Jennifer, get some of the losers in here to sit in the audience of the infomercial," they barked.

Before I could respond with the obvious question, they amended the first request with this, "And we're not paying anything so you'll have to go look in the gutters."

"Ok," I yelled back, "I'll get started right away, in the gutters, sure thing, boss."

Now, remember, this is the first time I had ever worked on anything like this, so I had no point of reference as to how to accommodate the producers' requirements and to balance the *talent* and the staff's requirements. I'm not excusing myself from doing a terrible job, but I'm just letting you know that this was as foreign to me as it sounds to you. These guys functioned on favors, I soon realized, which was why it barely functioned. I was charged with calling in a favor from a casting company (that supposedly owed our company a favor, but in reality, they didn't... see, I'm not the only one living in an alternative universe) and ask them to float us some headshots and some *talent* on spec. Ok, I learned that that NEVER happens in this business, unless there's a blowjob somewhere in the equation. So I hit the street to find talent; I called friends and friends of friends and roommates and eventually some headshots started to trickle in. Ugly, ugly, nasty, filthy people; but apparently, right up the alley of what the bosses had in mind. Untalented, inexperienced, unreliable people. Most were hookers, I think. I remember some old people, as well, and I'm not sure how I came across them, but I responded anyway.

One of the harder things in the beginning of this project was trying to explain to people that this movie studio:

"What movies have you made?"

"Um, Toxic Avenger?"

"How come I haven't heard of anything you've produced?"

"Uh... we are shooting an infomercial," I'd digress.

Questions like, "When? Where? SAG required?" I had no idea of the answers. All I knew that the thing was to market their own old movies. And that the infomercial was going to be marketing itself, because it wasn't free, and it wasn't going to be broadcast so you had to buy it to see it (although I think that USA Network eventually broadcast it at 3am on a Tuesday, like 6 months after the fact). The fact was that I didn't get it, so I had an incredibly difficult time explaining it to a bunch of freaky wannabe stripper-druggie-actor-strangers. I had to set up appointments, mainly for the strippers/actresses, to come in and have one-on-one's with the guys. That was tricky. Interesting, but tricky. Since I didn't know the guys' schedules (and I certainly couldn't ask), there was no way of telling when they'd be around to look at girls in bikinis. Ok, so it wasn't that hard once I put it that way; but still, I couldn't quite explain to these women that this wasn't actually a porno or some illicit production or an entrapment, since I wasn't sure of that myself.

I remember some of these women, it was unreal. Drug addicted, young, old, fat, nasty, stupid, ugly. Yes, one had a third nipple, featured on her resume. I was in charge of getting them onboard this peculiar production, and my wonderful personality was all I had to do it with. I was mainly successful in that; and met some interesting people along the way, one of whom I'll get to later; suffice it to say that she had a quadruple-F bra and wanted me to be her personal assistant. I set up some appointments, and when I was relieved to learn that I didn't actually have to run the casting sessions, as they called them, I was excused. A couple of times things got so rowdy around the office that the little Russian bookkeeper lady and I would sneak off to the budget movie theater down the street.

Then came Dee Dee Ramone. He came up to the office in a 3-piece suit, virtually toothless, and quite evidently having a tough time functioning without whichever substance that had kept him functioning for years prior. He was trying to become an actor or a spokesperson, and move away from punk rock music. The Ramones were one of my favorite punk rock bands, and I was disappointed that Dee Dee was such a train wreck, and that he wasn't still enthusiastic about the music that I cared so much about. But if I could help him get on with his life, then I'd feel like I had done my part for punk rock — that is, until later, when I started my

record label... later chapter. I didn't necessarily know where in this infomercial Dee Dee would fit, but then again, nothing fit.

"And it's nice to meet you, Jennifer, thanks a lot for inviting me. I've always loved these movies," Dee Dee said to me as I buzzed him in the door and he trudged up the stairs to the office.

"I've always been such a huge fan of yours, it's really great to meet you," and I stopped myself there before I babbled on about music too much.

"Yeah, I'm not doing that anymore. I'm an actor now," he said, faking a smile and lacking any authority whatsoever. Like he was saying someone else's line.

"Sure, right, well, then, cool. Here we are," affirmatively, I said, like I understood his decision.

"So what is this thing, what am I doing?" he asked.

"Well, Dee Dee, it's complicated, but it will be funny, I promise," I said, hoping that something I said would stick and we could connect on some level. Not so much.

When I let the bosses know that Dee Dee was on board, they were over the moon and I felt so proud. They assumed, though, and I kind of led them on, that Dee Dee would be playing the Dee Dee that we all knew and loved, the Ramones punk rocker. Again, not so much. Dee Dee showed up on the set in his 3-piece suit, no slicked back hair, still toothless, and otherwise unrecognizable as a punk rock hero and looked more like a recovering drug addict trying to turn his life around a little too quickly.

Towards the end of this "casting" period, I found out that there was to be an audience and then there would also be the "featured" talent; plus the "testimonials." I was so confused and overworked that nothing made sense. It still doesn't, but I actually remember my state of mind back then, and I was on the verge of falling off the edge. Nothing was ever right, I never made the right decision, nothing was what the bosses wanted, I had no idea what they wanted, they had no idea what they wanted. I remember one of them, when he got angry, the veins in his neck would pop out, and his face would get red, and he would cock his head and look out the window, and then he would start screaming. The other one, who was totally out of his mind, would just pace around and stomp and get totally freaked out and repeat things over and over again like a regular lunatic. I wanted to be able to let this stuff roll off me, but I took everything personally. I was working 15 hour days and sleeping on my friend's couch on 95th street, because the commuter trains didn't

leave early enough or go home late enough to get me back to my parents' house in the 'burbs. There was a guy who worked there who was so cool about stuff; and he had absolutely nothing to do with this stupid infomercial. I wanted to handle it like him. He was a biker and was one of the most cynical people I had ever met. I still wonder why he worked there; I don't think he had ever even seen one of these movies. I don't think he watched movies. I think he just drank beer, smoked cigarettes, and talked shit.

Amazingly, this production got off the ground. I had to find a soundstage to film it and put down a deposit consisting of no money. So then I had to find another soundstage who would take us with very little money. This was in the middle of summer, and I found a couple of college kids who would help me organize this thing for free, just as long as they got to be in the infomercial, or wear a stupid monster costume or something. Pathetic. Both of them were disgusting guys who wouldn't stop asking me out and I was completely grossed out, but I had to work with them because I desperately needed the help. Idiots. I think I may have blocked out some of the details here, or I may have blocked out some of the details, considering I was drinking heavily. Actually, I had started years earlier, but the drinking beer part became a vital part of my life. Forties, still.

Later that summer I successfully extracted myself from my parents house, to a hallway I called home on West 21st Street. I shared a "studio," whatever the hell that meant. My space was actually a hallway for \$425/month. That was half my monthly salary. Seriously, it was a hallway. The hallway connected the kitchen to the living room/bedroom, and I had the benefit of my own personal space with a mattress in the hallway. So when I would pass out drunk in this heatbox, naked in the hallway-bedroom, my roommate would bring her boyfriends home and tell them to ignore me. And then I'd get up and go to work the next day, to get yelled at and manage this absurd production that I knew would get me no gratitude because it was so stupid and useless.

We shot the damned thing, with the ugly drug-addicted nasty strippers, the dominatrixes, the extras, my brother, Dee Dee, the dumb college kid wearing the smelly moldy monster outfit, and whatever other freaks loomed around the studio.

And nothing really happened with it.

Chapter **4**

chapter 9

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