

How I Learned to Live as I Choose To and Not as I “Should”

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I remember the day it happened – the morning I woke up after working for years as a clinical negligence lawyer and saw with sudden clarity that this is what my life would be like until I retired. And I felt like I was starring in Edvard Munch's *The Scream*.

What I'd always suspected finally hit me in a way I couldn't ignore any more – I had to get out of this profession before I become a permanent passenger in my life. I handed in my notice that day, and walked out of the office for the last time on 30 June, 2009 with no idea of what was to follow.

It's funny – all my life, I have followed my own path and done my own thing. To the outside world, I always seemed to be doing what I wanted. My mother has told me many times that, even as a very young child, I was happier going off and playing by myself, doing my own thing, making my own way, rather than waiting for others.

This trend has continued throughout my life, but as I grew older, I always seemed to be pushing against something, rather than going towards what I wanted to do. At least, that was the story I told myself. When I decided to study law, it was mainly because I didn't want to be a doctor, like my father and sister. When I was in university, I spent all my time involved with music, but still I listened to the voice that kept telling me law was my holy grail. In relationships, even when I knew they weren't right for me, I told myself that I *should* stay with them because that was the choice I had made.

I realize now that I was pushing against who I really was, resisting the call to embrace the shining soul underneath the social conditioning and misguided beliefs. The critical voice inside my head kept pushing me on – always striving for better, faster, more – but the same voice couldn't let me enjoy what I had achieved, and whispered its poison in

my ear to keep me looking “over there.”

On the first day of my first legal job, after 5 years of study, I knew deep down that this wasn't what I wanted to do, but I kept going with it because the voice told me it would be a “waste” to give up all those years of study to pursue music. And so, for the next 14 years I worked hard and did well, pushing myself as I always did, and managing to ignore the unhappiness that always lurked beneath the façade of success.

I couldn't always ignore it, of course. I had a few bouts of depression and was on medication for a while, and I made a few half-hearted bids for freedom into other careers that never worked out, because I still felt I “should” be able to make things work as a lawyer.

Everything changed when I met the man I believed was my soul mate. At the time, he really was, in the true sense of the word, as he helped me see the truth of who I was and always held true to that vision, even when I couldn't see it myself. With his help, I started looking inwards, and began asking questions I had never dared ask before.

I plugged myself into my iPod each morning before going to work and flooded my brain with positive affirmations. I did a life coaching course, followed by a leadership programme. I devoured books on spiritual growth and development.

This process of awakening was so painful at times. The shattering of my ego left me feeling lost, alone, and scared, but I kept going. I felt I had no choice – this was a one-way journey, and **you can't go back to sleep once you've glimpsed the truth of yourself.**

“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”
~Anaïs Nin

And so, in the midst of all this soul-searching and inner work, the day came when I knew deep in my soul that I just couldn't keep working in a job which made me so miserable. Although I didn't know what was next, after working 9 months' notice, I gave myself the gift of a 6 month mini-retirement, with full permission just to “be” and not “do.”

I am so grateful that I gave myself such a wonderful gift – no pressure to find a job, no pressure to do anything other than to reconnect with who I really was, and start dismantling the old stories I'd been telling myself for all those years.

And during those six months, I rediscovered my love of creating. I have always enjoyed sculpting things, but only ever dabbled in it – music is what I was always encouraged to pursue. I hadn't touched polymer clay for nearly 10 years, but I found some old blocks and decided to have a play – and all these wee creatures started pouring out!

The main thing I remember about this time was just how much fun I had. I woke up early, stayed up late, and giggled as each creature appeared. I just played full out and pleased no one except myself. I had so much energy, and for once, I felt more fully myself than I ever had before.

The voice didn't go away completely, but I did learn to work with it, rather than push against it. My drive to do better kept me honing my skills, techniques and ideas, and my business background helped me to create an identity for this new sculpting venture. Before too long, demand for the wee creatures began to grow, and within 18 months I was making a full-time income, and my business as continued to grow ever since.

Over the years, I have continued my own inner work and, as with most things, there have been highs and lows, but above all, I can say that I am truly living my life as I choose to and not as I “should.” I am finally learning to trust my inner wisdom as to what's right for me – if something makes me giggle, I know I'm on the right path!

I have no regrets about spending all that time as a lawyer – I now have a unique skill set that has proved invaluable in working for myself, and I have a true appreciation of what happens when we choose to follow our hearts, rather than bow to external (and internal) pressure.

I often meet people on the cusp of a major life decision, and I feel that sharing my story with them helps others to follow their bliss. **My advice, when asked, is always the same – do what you love, what makes you happy, and everything else falls into place.**