

Living life without regrets

"Gone are the days we stopped to decide, where we should go, we just ride"

By: Jill Matlow, Feature Writer, Wall Street Dead aHead Family Member



Photo courtesy of Jill Matlow

"Forget regret, or life is yours to miss"

Almost thirty years ago, the composer, lyricist and playwright Jonathan Larson (who penned the above lyrics), met an untimely death, just hours before his masterpiece *Rent* was about to begin previews. Misdiagnosed by two hospitals and sent home, Jonathan Larson died at the young age of 35 from an aortic dissection caused by his undiagnosed Marfan's syndrome.

I remember watching the original cast from *Rent* on *Good Morning America* in 1996 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4sFUu_5z0Go) and being so blown away by that segment, that I subsequently hightailed it into NYC with two friends and was fortunate to catch *Rent* in previews with the original cast. Back then, and while still living in Philadelphia, I remember listening to the soundtrack from *Rent* as I sent out resumes for NYC jobs.

“Five hundred twenty-five thousand six hundred minutes...”

For many years, dating back to my childhood, I knew that I belonged in NYC and that if I never pulled the proverbial trigger and moved here, I would have regretted that decision to my dying day.

Fast-forward and I'm now living in NYC, 29 years after seeing *Rent* for the first time. In a strange twist of irony, I recently had the pleasure of going to see *The Jonathan Larson Project* (3 times I might add), a musical showcasing a treasure trove of songs Jonathan Larson had previously written that were never published.

I felt as though I had come full circle.

Life is short and fleeting at the same time and if you're like me, you definitely don't want to have any regrets when your time is up. I look back over my life and have found that when I've taken chances or calculated risks, they've always paid off. I never want to look back and say to myself: *“I wish I had...”*

I always love learning more about my fellow WSDaH Family members and what makes them tick (tick boom). With so many new members on board, it was time for me to hear about their “trigger-pulling moments” that led them to alleviate any regrets that might have come down the road for them. Can you relate to any of their stories?

“When I was 16, I had my eye on getting an electric guitar. My brother had previously purchased a flying V and a tiny amp, but he never played it. I would sneak it out to play—though it wouldn't stay in tune and felt like it was built from scrap wood and wishful thinking. I realized I needed to buy my guitar, and a better one, but I figured I'd wait until after our family vacation to Los Angeles to get my own.

That trip to LA turned out to be more than just sunshine and sightseeing. My parents booked me for a battery of aptitude tests at Johnson O'Connor. I thought it was a waste of time. Let's just say I wasn't in peak condition for the testing and the results showed that I had scored in the lowest percentile in music aptitude—pitch and rhythm. Ouch. I had studied classical piano for ten years, but because it was all on paper and memorization, I couldn't just sit down and play something. And now, apparently, I had no natural ear for music.

Despite the gut punch about music, I decided to get the guitar anyway. A friend's older brother who played in a garage punk band told me that if I couldn't afford a Fender or Gibson (I was a busboy with a slim budget), I should look for an Ibanez. I saved up \$100 and found an Ibanez Blazer at a local shop. The first time I tuned it up and it stayed in tune, I was over the moon.

I practiced obsessively. My parents would come in at midnight to tell me to go to bed. So I'd sneak out with the guitar, climb onto the roof, and play unplugged under the stars—watching the radio antenna lights blink on the Sandia Mountains in the distance. Music travels up, and without an amp, no one could hear me. But I could hear myself. And I kept working at it.

Even though the tests said pitch wasn't my strength, I decided to lean into it. I worked on ear training, studied theory, and tried lessons. I took a year off college and spent it playing, to the dismay of my dad, who probably thought I'd locked myself in my room for good. I was learning how to learn. Slowly, I started to understand the theory not just in my head, but in my hands. I could hear and feel a flat 7, a minor 3rd, a Lydian #4—and express it, not just name it.

Back in college, I kept learning. What had once felt like a foreign language now felt natural—like I could finally speak through the instrument. Music became a way to process, escape, and express things I didn't have the words for. It saved me in ways I only now appreciate.

Eventually, I went to law school, and I earned a Masters in tax law. That might seem like a sharp turn from music, but in a way, it wasn't. Music has taught me how to learn deeply. It has taught me creativity within structure. That same discipline and creativity now helps me solve problems in the tax world—especially the kinds of puzzles that come with equity compensation, structuring, and multi-layered business issues.

Today, I'm a practicing tax attorney, and I still play music. I write songs, play in a band, and even started singing (once I got fed up with dealing with 'lead singer syndrome'). Looking back, I'm grateful I ignored the aptitude results and got that guitar. It wasn't just about music—it was about pursuing something meaningful with attention and intensity."

[Steve Lueker](#), Partner, [Moses & Singer LLP](#)

"Looking back, one of the things I would have definitely regretted not doing was packing up and heading to the mountains for a winter right after graduating college in Boston. I wasn't entirely sure what I wanted to do career-wise, but I had this voice inside my head saying, 'Be a ski bum.' So I listened—and it turned out to be one of the best decisions I ever made. That season, I snowboarded my heart out, met incredible people, and unknowingly laid the foundation for a career that would take me all over the world.

That one winter led me out west, where I joined the opening team at The Canyons Resort in Park City, Utah. I hustled hard and moved up the ranks—from Guest Services Supervisor on the mountain to Front Office Manager of 3 brand-new resort hotels—then into a role as International Tour & Travel Manager at Deer Valley. From there, I rose again to become Director of Sales at a local tour operator. My career evolved from domestic ski travel to global adventures, planning luxury escapes throughout the Alps, Thailand, Africa, and South America. I'd often plan business trips around concerts, with travel and live music always being my two biggest passions. Life was amazing, a beautiful blur of powder days, passport stamps and legendary shows.

After nearly two decades in luxury adventure travel, I became a mom—and the road warrior lifestyle didn't quite fit anymore. So I pivoted. I traded mountain passes for concert laminates and stepped into the role of Special Events Sales Manager at The Capitol Theatre. These days, I fill my soul (and my calendar) with incredible fundraisers and benefit concerts, epic private parties and help make rock-and-roll dream events magical. I may not be eating truffle pasta in a cozy Italian ski village these days, but there truly ain't no place I'd rather be. Moral of the story? Be the ski bum. No regrets."

[Lauren Northey](#), Special Events Sales Manager, [The Capitol Theatre](#) & [Garcia's](#)

"7/5/95. Riverport Amphitheatre in Maryland Heights, Missouri

Sadly, this was the date and place of my one and only Grateful Dead show. Yes, I was late to the party, and yes, I have done everything I can to make up for it by seeing as many iterations of The Dead as possible since. But my lone memory of seeing Jerry in the flesh is him sporting bright green pants and looking, eh, not-so-hot.

But more than that, this was a hometown show for me. I was born and raised in St. Louis, went to college at Indiana University, then moved to Chicago shortly after graduating. I had a pretty large group of high school friends and college buddies that were also living in Chi-Town at the time. I was in my mid-20s and was having the time of my life—seeing music 5 nights a week, watching the sun rise on a regular basis and just being young without a care in the world.

Chicago felt very safe.

While my career was not my primary focus during that time of my life, I always knew I was destined for bigger things professionally. So when a field rep position with Victorinox/Swiss Army opened up, I interviewed immediately. I crushed it and knew an offer was imminent.

However, when the phone rang, the conversation didn't go exactly as I had planned. I was told that the husband of their field rep on the East Coast had just accepted a job in Chicago, and she would be transferring and taking the open position that I was counting on. They liked me, but unless I wanted to move to New Jersey, there was nothing they could offer me.

Hmmm...

I had been to NYC a number of times, but it seemed so far and the thought of living there was so foreign. And terrifying. After all, I'm a Midwesterner, we're on a completely different wavelength!

Luckily for me, my then-future-wife did not share my trepidation. She grew up in Philadelphia and her whole family was living in Long Island and New Jersey. She encouraged me to take the job and the two of us packed up a U-Haul and drove 12 ½ hours to our new place in Hoboken.

I have now lived on the East Coast for over 20 years, officially longer than I lived in St. Louis. I got married in Long Island, am raising two daughters in New Jersey, have planted personal and professional roots and can navigate my way from the Physical Graffiti building on St. Mark's Place to Electric Lady Studios to The Chelsea Hotel to The Bitter End.

Had I not made the decision to leave the comfort of familiarity behind, I would have regretted it for the rest of my life. That leap of faith not only brought me to the East Coast but also to this incredible group of kindred spirits who remind me every day that life's journey, much like a Dead show, is all about the magic of the unexpected."

[Kevin Deutsch](#), Business Performance Advisor, [Insperity](#)

"Back in 1986 at the age of 28, I was an equal partner with three others in an ad agency on Long Island. My role in the group was agency producer, responsible for all TV, video, radio and event production. Our clients consisted of small to midsize companies, and we always struggled to attract clients of any greater stature, as our primary industry competitors were located just 35 miles away in New York City.

Over the next several years, we grew modestly, but I was becoming impatient as we could never quite get over the hump of being recognized as just a 'Long Island Agency'. To me the only way we were ever really going to compete for bigger and more profitable opportunities was to create a point of differentiation between our small agency and the big guys. But how?

As a producer, I always wanted to keep pushing the limits of creativity and decided to invest my time to learn as much as I could about interactive media. My interest in pursuing this new endeavor was not shared by my three other partners, who said, 'we decided that what you are working on is going to be another passing fad and it's taking up too much of your time, so please discontinue your efforts and refocus on our core business'.

That hit me like a ton of bricks.

But instead of backing off, I worked nights and weekends to continue my education. After a year and a half, I became proficient enough to produce audio visually rich interactive presentations that could be delivered via my brand-new Apple MacIntosh Centris 650. I also learned that these presentations could be distributed via an emerging medium called a CD-ROM. It was all starting to come together.

I was now hooked and my faith in new media caused me to become frustrated with my current working situation. This was now 1993, and at 35 years old, I decided to leave the agency I co-founded and start my own company, Millennium Communications, Inc. (BTW—I named the company after the Millennium Falcon spaceship in Star Wars).

I left my six-figure income, health benefits and an established business behind to fully embrace an unknown future. And my ever-supporting wife had just given birth to our second child. How's that for putting it all on the line? Talk about taking a huge risk!

Fast forward thirty years. Millennium went from being a sole proprietorship creating interactive CD-ROMs, to a web development company (we helped create the first websites for 1800Flowers.com and TheStephenKingLibrary.com) to a full-service digital communications agency working with global companies like JPMorgan Chase and Bimbo Bakeries USA (Entenmann's, Little Bites).

So, looking back, betting on myself paid off as I sold Millennium in 2022 and began my new journey with my old hobby and new music business venture—AmericanHitNetwork.com. To say I would have regretted not taking a risk when I did would be a huge understatement. Believe in yourself and the rest will follow.”

[Patrick Macri](#), Executive Producer, [AmericanHitNetwork.com](#)

“No day but today”. Lyrics that are now so prophetic especially coming from Jonathan Larson. We can all take a page out of his book, can't we? What's something you might regret if you don't act on it now? And what's keeping YOU from pulling the proverbial trigger? We'd love to know!

*“There's only us, there's only this
Forget regret, or life is yours to miss
No other road, no other way
No day but today”*

Reference: Larson, J. (1996) 'No Day But Today', 'Seasons of Love', Rent Original Broadway Cast Recording.
New York City: Uni Distribution Corp.