

Searching for the light at the end of the tunnel *“Every silver lining...”*

By Jill Matlow, Wall Street Dead aHead Family Member



Photo courtesy of pixabay.com

I went to my dentist in 2020 in the middle of the pandemic (I know, I know, did I really need to get that cleaning?). After the hygienist was finished mining for gold, i.e. cleaning my teeth, my dentist walked into the room and asked: *“What has been a silver lining for you during the pandemic?”* I was really caught off guard. Most people had been so negative during this time. I found his positivity to be so refreshing. Talk about a change of perspective! I replied that I had read a lot more books in the last few months and appreciated taking in the silence of the city during my daily walks.

(In case you're wondering, I didn't have any cavities that day so that was a silver lining too!)

As we all reflect on what will probably be the most memorable 2+ years of our lives, did you ever stop to think about the positives that emerged after your personal years of hell? As a society, we tend to sometimes focus on the negative, bringing to mind that old adage: “misery loves company”. Yet, sitting in the dentist’s chair that day, really made me stop and question if my default had typically been negativity and unfortunately the answer was yes, even more so during the pandemic. Talk about a revelation!

Like most of you, one of the challenges for me during the pandemic was not being able to see many of the friends and business contacts I had met through WSDaH. Through the monthly jams, girls' hangs, VIP events and annual events, my social calendar was always full. Fortunately, with zoom and the phone, I was able to maintain many of those relationships, although I think we can all agree that they are definitely not a replacement for in-person contact.

During the darker days these past few years and in seeking comfort (and as I've done in the past), I listened to the Grateful Dead a lot. It brought me back to the good old days and filled me up with a lot of hope and inspiration for brighter days ahead. One of the songs I listened to frequently was "Crazy Fingers" and this particular lyric really resonated with me: *"Life may be sweeter for this, I don't know, Feels like it might be all right"*. I'm not sure if describing the pandemic as "sweeter" is appropriate, but feeling like things would be all right always lifted me out of those days which seemed to never end.

When I posed the question to some of my fellow WSDaH Family members, it made me realize that I was not alone in how I felt (and dealt with) the pandemic, especially for those of us who decided to stay in NYC. I wanted to hear what some of their silver linings were both in their personal and professional lives. I found their stories to be so inspirational. And since WSDaH also went through some significant changes resulting in a positive outcome, I thought it was a perfect story to lead with:

"You can please some of the people..."

Wall Street Dead aHead Networking LLC® (WSDaH) had been a long strange trip until we finally found our golden road. I originally started this group to meet new business contacts, as conferences and networking events I had previously attended felt like high school reunions. I never thought it would last this long or turn into what it is today.

2012 was our first event and by mid-2014 I thought I was done. I had spoken to every person who contacted me about WSDaH, everyone who had registered, and I made networking a second full-time job. I met more business contacts than I ever imagined I would, and made some good friends along way. At inception, I was more focused on my career and while I was happy when I heard about other business connections, I was motivated to expand my own network.

So I asked myself: "What do I do now"? Do I shut down WSDaH or keep it going"? I had such success within a year and a half, I wanted others to have the same opportunity. So I kept going and WSDaH blew up with: Annual Events (which sold out months in advance with extended wait lists), monthly jam sessions (with celebrity appearances), Ladies and NextGen meet-ups, VIP Events for premier sponsors, a private LinkedIn group, podcasts and of course our blog. While everyone was having fun, there was also networking resulting in lots of Family Collaborations to announce. But WSDaH was losing its' core focus—networking. I felt like I created a northbound train social club and there was no one to blame but myself. I was tired, miserable and I became a people-pleaser (which I never had been before). My apartment turned into the WSDaH club house and was overflowing with boxes of merchandise and promotional items. I was working insane hours and never getting a break. At the end of 2019, I ended up with double pneumonia and decided at the end of 2020 WSDaH would be no more.

Then COVID hit.

In the beginning, I was inundated with current members and people who hadn't been involved for years asking me for referrals in the group. I kept directing everyone to the WSDaH LinkedIn group but they still expected me to network for them. As time went on, people were asking why we weren't doing in-person events, jam sessions or meet-ups. What I realized was 1). Members who originally joined to network were continuing to network 2). Members (who even though there were plenty of people for them to network with) only wanted social activities. 3). Some people were just involved for the social aspect. And lastly, everyone I spoke to was on a different page when it came to COVID. My head was spinning. I put 10 years into building this community, now what do I do?

I took a step back and consulted with our Board and sponsors, revisiting our core mission which was to form solid business relationships and friendships and help others along the way. There were lots of inquiries to join the group. I felt I owed it to the people who really wanted to network and to the sponsors who supported us all these years to keep it going. But how was I going to do that without anyone feeling left out? Conferences and cocktail parties were starting and not everyone was comfortable going. With my apologies to Jerry, I think Abraham Lincoln said it best: "You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time".

WSDaH's silver lining? The Networking Buses were born. As so much had pivoted in the rest of the world, we also needed to as well. Current members, old and new, are now involved in our core mission. Business is getting done, members (even if they don't need to network for their current position) are actively helping others, friendships are forming and members are getting together on their own without waiting for me to organize. I couldn't be happier and the members are too! I will never say that we won't ever have in-person events again but for now the Networking Buses are here to stay. Why should anyone be excluded? We are not just a group, we are a Family and we look out for each other.. And in the end, that's what matters the most.

[Deborah Solomon](#), Founder, [Wall Street Dead aHead Networking LLC®](#)

"Maybe you'll find direction..."

In early 2020, I was in the midst of planning a road trip across Portugal with some of my dearest friends. Having only very limited previous opportunities to travel internationally in my life, as well as the miracle of aligning the schedules and lives of eight busy professionals from cities across the country, this felt like a very big deal. We were supposed to leave April 6, 2020 and for obvious reasons, the trip was called off a few weeks prior. At the time, this was a momentous disappointment. Like most of you, I too was naive to how the pandemic would truly upend life as we knew it and naive to the greater struggles that lie ahead.

My colleague and close friend Joe Panganiban called me up a few nights after we officially pulled the plug on our trip and suggested a crazy idea that we go back to school! There was a very specific MBA program with a concentration in Music Business through Berklee College of Music and the next term was starting the very same day we were supposed to leave. We scrambled to pull it together and on April 6th, instead of going to Europe, we jumped back into education.

Fast forward two years later and we recently graduated this past May. It wasn't the original international road trip adventure we had planned but a journey nonetheless. Admittedly, we didn't actually go to the ceremony, we decided instead to walk for something greater that late spring weekend, at the Women's March through Boston's historic freedom trail. My career had been specialized up until this point in creating equity in our country's art's education landscape and while I'm not sure what the future will hold, I know I'll use my knowledge and the lessons gained from this unexpected education to continue to try to make the world a better place. The line from one of my very favorite songs, Box of Rain, continues to guide my way: "Maybe you'll find direction around some corner where it's been waiting to meet you."

[Miranda Altman](#), Chief Operating Officer – [Education Through Music](#)

"Inspiration move me brightly..."

In 2020, as the world shut down for the Covid pandemic (or as my household referred to it as “The Great Pause”), I found it was also the absolute worst time to be in the job market. Especially for a middle-aged corporate and commercial attorney with 25 years of in-house public company experience, including as general counsel. I started my search in the latter half of 2019, three and a half years after having taken a buyout from my company, spending the ensuing years recovering from surgery and caring for two of my teen-aged children as they were treated for severe medical issues. Now, firmly into The Great Pause, prospects went from bleak to non-existent.

Having been responsible for legal services for almost every facet of a public company which designed, manufactured, distributed and retailed branded apparel, accessory and cosmetic products, I naively thought my experience would be hard to ignore. I thought my background and experience in product licensing, international distribution agreements and major acquisitions with revenue increases would be appealing to most. Not to mention my expertise with S.E.C. filings and interactions with the Board of Directors as a Corporate Secretary.

As it turns out, none of that seemed to work in my favor.

Perhaps I was at a point in my career where I was overqualified: 25 years experience far exceeded the years of experience posted jobs advertised for—and here I thought my long career would be a plus. It certainly didn't help that companies were implementing hiring freezes or eliminating job searches altogether during the pandemic-fueled business downturn.

Regardless of why the job search wasn't panning out, I realized that: I was not ready for retirement; that many companies could benefit from my years of varied corporate and commercial legal experience; and that I may have been taking the wrong approach in my search. Rather than seeking employment at companies, which might have been limited in their ability to hire new full-time employees, I instead began looking at those same companies as potential clients who might be more open to engaging in-house legal services on a more limited basis. Not full time or part time employment as in-house counsel, but something different. That was my aha moment.

Through my network, I met with numerous business leaders and owners in various industries to discuss their legal needs and use of counsel. It seemed having an attorney to call on a regular basis was of interest, especially someone with my background.. I also determined that small and mid-sized companies were in need of, yet least likely to have, in-house counsel. Based on these conversations, I founded [Alternum Law](#), which provides fractional general counsel services to small and mid-sized companies. I guess in the end, these song lyrics really do ring true: “Sometimes you get shown the light, in the strangest of places if you look at it right.”

[Chris DiNardo](#), Esquire, [Alternum Law](#)

The above testimonials give me hope that we are moving in a positive direction. Things will definitely never be the same after these last 2+ years we've experienced, but I'm optimistic that in the end, “*feels like it might be all right*”...

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